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Graduate Program in Media Studies
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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THE INVISIBLE GENOCIDE: AN ANALYSIS OF ABC, CBS, AND NBC
TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF THE 1994 GENOCIDE IN RWANDA

(Spine title: THE INVISIBLE GENOCIDE)

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by

DANIEL CHANDLER HARVEY

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

Abstract

Previous scholarly studies of the relationship between the media and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda focus on the international newspaper coverage of the genocide, the use of print and radio hate propaganda by genocide perpetrators, and the international community's refusal to jam Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines's (RTLM) hate radio broadcasts. Working at the intersection of genocide studies and media studies, this thesis contributes to the existing scholarly discourse by analyzing the daily content of the genocide on ABC, CBS, and NBC television news broadcasts between April 6, 1994 and July 18, 1994. I conclude that the American networks often used stereotypes that erroneously suggested the genocide was African 'tribal warfare'; misunderstood and misreported key information; focused on sensational entertainment stories; and contributed to a failed international response. My findings contribute to a growing discourse of genocide prevention and enable scholars, journalists, and the public to learn from the failed television news coverage.

Keywords

Rwanda, 1994, Genocide, News Media, ABC World News, NBC Nightly News, CBS Evening News, Tutsi, Hutu.

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Introduction

"The news media—both domestic and international—played a crucial role in the 1994 Rwanda genocide."

--Romeo Dallaire¹

On April 6, 1994, the world was introduced genocide in Rwanda. In the aftermath of the genocide, scholars from many disciplinary backgrounds have asked how the international community—especially the Belgians, the French, the Americans, and the member nations of the UN Security Council—were able to sit back and observe the murder of close to one million people in one hundred days without intervening to stop the killing. My thesis explores an important, but under-represented, element of the failed international response: the coverage of the Rwandan genocide by the US television news networks. Existing scholarship about the media and the Rwandan genocide has focused on the perpetrators' use of hate propaganda in print and on Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) radio broadcasts², the international community's refusal to jam RTLM's radio signals³, and international newspaper coverage of genocide.^{4,5} My thesis

¹ Romeo Dallaire, "The Media Dichotomy," in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 12.

² Alison Des Forges, "Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda, 1994," in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 41.

³ Mary Kimani, "RTLM: the Medium that Became a Tool for Mass Murder," in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 110.

⁴ Amanda Grzyb, "Media Coverage, Activism and Creating Public Will for Intervention in Rwanda and Darfur," in *The World and Darfur: International Response to Crimes Against Humanity in Western Sudan*, ed. Amanda Grzyb. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 61.

contributes to this scholarly discourse by analyzing daily coverage on ABC, CBS, and NBC television news broadcasts. Working at the intersection of media studies and comparative genocide studies, I suggest that the television news employed racist stereotypes, described the genocide as another instance of African 'tribal warfare,' misreported key information, and turned their focus to other more sensational stories.

While several scholars, such as Allan Thompson and Amanda Grzyb, have written about the newspaper coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, my research focuses on the impact of television news reports during the same period. I divide my analysis into two time periods: April 6 to April 30 and May 1 to July 18. The first period represents both a critical window for international intervention, and the international media's establishment of a common public discourse about the nature of the Rwandan massacres. During the second period, the media focus shifted from confused reports of massacres to coverage of the growing refugee crisis.

The ABC, CBS and NBC television news footage was purchased and loaned from Vanderbilt University's *Television News Archive*. The footage used in the analysis referenced Rwanda in some capacity between April 6, 1994 and July 18, 1994. I conducted a content analysis after viewing the news footage chronologically and I noted all of discourse used by the journalists, broadcasters, and interviewees. I also noted all of the images and the text that the broadcaster

⁵ Alan Kuperman, "How the Media Missed the Rwanda Genocide," in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 256.

used on the screen. More specifically, my analysis of the television news coverage was guided by the following research questions:

1. What language do the journalists and anchors use to describe the genocide?
2. Who are the sources for the Rwanda stories? Witnesses and survivors? Expatriates trying to flee Rwanda? NGO, UN, or United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda officials? Representatives of the Clinton administration? Scholars or Experts?
3. How are images and audio material used to describe what is happening to the people of Rwanda in 1994? Is the material sourced from news services, or do the networks have journalists on the ground in Rwanda? Are networks using the same stock footage of violence? How are they contextualizing these images of violence? How graphic is the coverage; does it include images of massacres or corpses? Are the images primarily of women and children (which might suggest genocide and crimes against humanity) or primarily of men (which might suggest “civil war”)?
4. Where is the story placed within the broadcast and what is its duration? What does this placement reveal about network priorities?
5. How frequently are the broadcasters presenting stories about Rwanda?
6. How accurate is the information that the networks were presenting? When do they first use the word “genocide”?
7. What are the other stories that were making the headlines between April 6th, 1994 and July 18th, 1994? When Rwanda is not the lead story, what are some reasons why other stories were favoured over the genocide?

In Chapter One, I outline a brief chronological history of Rwanda, including the colonial era, the transition to independence, postcolonial Hutu–Tutsi conflict, the 1994 genocide, and the international media’s treatment of the genocide. I provide context for understanding the colonial origins of the genocide, and explain why the massacre of one million Tutsi and moderate Hutu was not ‘tribal warfare’.

In Chapter Two, I analyze ABC, CBS, and NBC television news coverage of the genocide between April 6, 1994 and April 30, 1994. The coverage during the first month of the genocide reveals the dominant news frames, errors and misinformation perpetuated by the networks, and reflects the complacency of the UN and the international community. As Linda Melvern suggests, it was the initial reporting during the month of April that essentially laid the groundwork for the misreporting that followed in the summer of 1994. This phenomenon was especially apparent when the news media suggested that the genocide “was the result of ancient tribal hatreds,” which was, in Melvern’s words, “quite simply wrong.”⁶

In what immediately took hold as the dominant stereotype, the American television networks unanimously described the Rwandan genocide as chaotic tribal warfare. Amanda Grzyb suggests that the racialized discourse of “‘tribal warfare’ paints Africans (in general) and Rwandans, Hutu and Tutsi (in particular) with perilously broad strokes.”⁷ I also suggest that the assumption that news media can reprioritize government intervention in Africa after 1993 is often misguided, primarily because of the “misunderstanding of the causes of intervention in Somalia.”⁸ Ultimately, this chapter will explore television news discourse filled with “African” stereotypes, the connections between the coverage of Somalia and Rwanda, the reasons why Rwanda was not a ‘good story’ for the

⁶ Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 198.

⁷ Grzyb, “Media Coverage, Activism and Creating Public Will for Intervention in Rwanda and Darfur,” 65.

⁸ Steven Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the American Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 189.

media industry, and the ways in which the story of the genocide “simply did not break through” with any accuracy until it was practically over.⁹

In Chapter Three, I analyze the American television coverage between May 1, 1994 and July 18, 1994. After the first month of coverage, the media networks significantly decreased the number of stories about the genocide. Coverage did not pick up again until the end of July, when the networks produced a rush of stories of the growing Hutu refugee crisis in Goma, Zaire.¹⁰ The ABC, CBS and NBC coverage in May and June presented many of the same racist stereotypes and inaccurate claims about “tribal warfare” that they used to describe the genocide in Rwanda the month prior. As Grzyb suggests, “western media coverage of Africa remains entrenched in the language and ideologies of colonialism, which used stereotypes to justify the widespread abuse, exploitation and enslavement of African peoples.”¹¹ My third chapter also demonstrates how, in Romeo Dallaire’s words, Rwanda was still of “little strategic value” for the international community, including the news media.¹² Finally, I also demonstrate how other stories – including the O.J. Simpson case, the South African elections, the Tonya Harding arrest, and the deteriorating situation in the former Yugoslavia – overshadowed the television coverage of the genocide.¹³

Ultimately, my research provides a significant look at the American television news networks’ poor coverage of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

⁹ Thompson, Allan. “Introduction,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁰ Thompson, “Introduction,” 7.

¹¹ Grzyb, “Media Coverage, Activism and Creating Public Will for Intervention in Rwanda and Darfur,” 68.

¹² Dallaire, “The Media Dichotomy,” 14.

¹³ Dallaire, “The Media Dichotomy,” 14.

Overall, this analysis will add new resources to the current research on the international media and coverage of the 1994 genocide, which will hopefully guide future newsmakers during their coverage of other crises. By conducting research at the intersection of media studies and genocide studies, it is my objective to help shape future responses, modify journalistic practices, and suggest that the news media can play an important role in genocide intervention and prevention.

CHAPTER ONE

Background: How Rwanda's Colonial History precipitated Genocide and How the International Media Ignored it.

In *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, Alison Des Forges writes that in order for one to “understand how some Rwandans could carry out a genocide and how the rest of the world could turn away from it, we must begin with history.”¹⁴ Misunderstanding the history and the context of the events in Rwanda between April 6 and July 18, 1994, was a fundamental flaw in the American television coverage. Understanding the events that occurred in the decades prior to the genocide helps to construct an informed understanding of both the origin and nature of the Tutsi massacres in 1994. As I outline in the following chapters, ABC, CBS and NBC appeared oblivious to Rwanda's past and did not provide nearly enough context for their viewers.

Pre-1994 History

Linda Melvern suggests that the history of pre-colonial Rwanda is “largely a mystery”¹⁵ to Americans, partially because Rwandans documented their history using oral myths and poems for hundreds of years. The pre-colonial Rwandan myths described the Rwandan kings, the Mwami, who “ruled the Earth's most

¹⁴ Alison Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda,” *Human Rights Watch & FIDH*, March 1, 1999, accessed September 10, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1999/rwanda/rwanda0399.htm>.

¹⁵ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 7.

powerful kingdom”¹⁶ and owned everything: the land, cattle and people. The original inhabitants of the region were the Twa (often all “Pygmies”), and the descendents of the people that are now known as the Hutu and Tutsi settled in and around the region over a period of roughly two thousand years.¹⁷ While building the kingdom of Rwanda, the people developed a single and highly sophisticated language, which was known as Kinyarwanda, and established a culture built around the value of “song, dance, poetry and rhetoric.”¹⁸

During Rwanda’s development, the vast majority of the population identified as cultivators and occasionally raised small livestock or cattle, but all of the governmental institutions in Rwanda were “shaped by both pastoralists and cultivators.”¹⁹ As Des Forges explains, “cultivators and pastoralists lived interspersed in most areas,” and when the first European explorers arrived in Rwanda, they used one’s occupation as an identifier for whether they were Hutu, Tutsi or Twa.²⁰ However, Linda Melvern²¹ and Mahmoud Mamdani²² both suggest that there is no consensus between historians and anthropologists about the origins of Hutu or Tutsi identities. Some anthropologists suggest that the Hutu and Tutsi are not in any way distinct groups, and their distinction is “more one of class or caste.”²³ Nor do scientists find any DNA differences between Hutu and Tutsi. Mamdani insists that the two scholarly traditions of the “distinct difference”

¹⁶ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 7.

¹⁷ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 7.

¹⁸ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

¹⁹ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁰ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²¹ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 8.

²² Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 42.

²³ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 8.

and the “no difference” arguments have influenced the development of scholarship about Rwanda’s history. In fact, since the debate surrounding the origins of the Tutsi and Hutu has been “from the outset framed in political terms by the colonial state,”²⁴ it has been a task for historical scholars to find the truth beneath the colonial discourse. The differences between Hutu and Tutsi developed as the Rwandan state grew and groups became more identifiable through their occupations. Des Forges writes that the word “Tutsi” was used to describe an individual who was “a person rich in cattle,” and, over time, became the signifier that referred to the “elite group.”²⁵ Alternatively, the word “Hutu” identified the “subordinate or follower of the more powerful person,” and the “mass of the ordinary people,” but these terms really did not spread completely across the country until after the first Europeans arrived.²⁶

Until 1890, the kingdoms of Ruanda-Urundi were isolated from the outside world and other nations. The first German and English explorers who set foot in Rwanda found themselves in the company of a population that was linguistically and culturally homogeneous, but had divided itself into three different groups: the Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa.²⁷ The realization that there were three different “groups” in the population was the foundation for the Western colonial discourse, in which the groups are “often and inappropriately...called the ‘tribes’ of Rwanda.”²⁸ Melvern concurs that “these groups were not tribes, for the people

²⁴ Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 42.

²⁵ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁶ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁷ Prunier, Gerald, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 5.

²⁸ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 5.

shared the same religion, told the same ancestral stories, and spoke the same language,”²⁹ and they were still able to do this despite the fact that “inequality was inscribed in the different treatment accorded to each group, and within each group.”³⁰ The suggestion that the Hutu, Twa and Tutsi were “distinct ethnic groups” started with an English explorer, John Henning Speke, who also named Lake Victoria in 1859.³¹

It is also important for scholars not to dispose of one myth and implement another one in its place—such as the suggestion that, in a pre-colonial society, the Hutu and Tutsi lived in “an eternally blissful harmony.”³² Without a doubt, the potential for conflict based on power or land certainly “existed long before the advent of European rule,” but scholars, such as Rene Lemarchand, look to the German and Belgian colonial rule as the “crucible within which ethnic identities were reshaped and mythologized.”³³ Other genocide scholars, such as Mamdani, also agree that “political identities are the consequence of how power is organized,” so the colonial organization of Rwanda into the ‘tribes’ “not only defines the parameters of the political community, telling us who is included and who was left out, it also differentiates the bound political community internally.”³⁴ Driven by theories of eugenics, the “organization of power” created by early colonial settlers determined who was “left out.”

²⁹ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 7.

³⁰ Rene Lemarchand, “The 1994 Rwanda Genocide,” in *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, ed. Samuel Totten et al. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 396.

³¹ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 8.

³² Lemarchand, “The 1994 Rwanda Genocide,” 396.

³³ Lemarchand, “The 1994 Rwanda Genocide,” 397.

³⁴ Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 22.

Since the beginning of German and Belgian colonial rule in Rwanda, ideas of ‘ethnicity’ have plagued the country. German and Belgian colonial settlers were influenced by the pseudoscience of eugenics and a desire for indirect rule of the Hutu majority via Tutsi leadership. German presence in Rwanda officially began on May 4, 1894—exactly one hundred years before the 1994 genocide—when the German count, Gustav Adolf von Gotzen, traveled to Rwanda as Governor of German East Africa.³⁵ At the time of Von Gotzen’s visit, King Rwabugiri of Rwanda was unaware that almost ten years earlier—after the 1885 Berlin Conference—European superpowers divided the African continent up into pieces—despite knowing nothing about the territory.³⁶ Ruanda-Urundi was claimed as part of German East Africa.

Many of the initial European colonizers suggested that Rwanda was “the Pearl of Africa”³⁷ or referred to it as the “Land of a Thousand Hills” because of the lush, hilly terrain. Since Rwanda is found within a unique geographical location surrounded by hills and jungle, appropriate land distribution and coordination with the ever-increasing population were difficult tasks. In addition to concerns about land distribution, the terrain also forced the new inhabitants to heavily rely on agriculture because they discovered that Rwanda was a landlocked country with very few exploitable natural resources.³⁸ If Rwanda had exploitable natural resources, the outcome of colonial settlement or the genocide

³⁵ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 7.

³⁶ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 7.

³⁷ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 7.

³⁸ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 7.

might have been drastically different, a point that some of the American television broadcasters acknowledged at the end of July.³⁹

When German rule evaporated during WWI, the territory of “East Africa,” which included Rwanda, was given to Belgium, which, Melvern observes, “intended to help those of the world’s peoples who were considered incapable of ruling themselves.”⁴⁰ Many of the same racial theories and views of economic exploitation implemented by Germany were continued after the Belgians took control of Ruanda-Urundi in 1916. Both Germany and Belgium “sought to rule Rwanda with the least cost and the most profit.”⁴¹ Understanding the organization of power within a colonial state like Rwanda is a complex matter, especially when there is no consensus on the origins of the Tutsi and the Hutu. Either way, the Hutu and Tutsis became racialized objects created through colonial rule that was influenced by eugenics and the science of race, which exacerbated existing power differences. In order to “compose” colonial states, Mamdani suggests that there are two different forms of political identity that are responsible: “direct and indirect rule.”⁴² Direct rule is created through “race-based political identities: settler and native,” and indirect rule fractures the “race consciousness of natives,” which is accomplished by separating the community “into multiple and separate ethnic consciousness.”⁴³

³⁹ “CBS Evening News,” (*New York: CBS Corporation Inc*), July 16, 1994.

⁴⁰ Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso, 2006), 5.

⁴¹ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁴² Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 24.

⁴³ Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 24.

The West has historically attempted to portray colonialism as a "civilizing project" for the benefit of the indigenous people.⁴⁴ This notion is known historically as the "white man's burden," and one of the primary objectives of the colonies carving out land was to introduce a Western style system of law and governance that legalized discrimination based on racial difference. Mamdani suggests that the manifestation of colonial constructed racial difference is based on the idea that "Tutsi aristocrats *looked* different from Hutu commoners."⁴⁵ Theories of eugenics—the organization of people based on race and physical characteristics—played a crucial role in Belgium's ability to alter the Rwandan state for the purpose of "administrative efficiency."⁴⁶ This included the systematic removal of Hutu from positions of power throughout the country, as well as excluding them from access to higher education, which inevitably rendered it impossible for Hutu to get careers with any political or economic clout.⁴⁷ As Des Forges suggests, the push towards Tutsi monopoly did not occur solely during the 1920s and 1930s, because it also took place during the next generation. Many scholars view this "divide and rule" strategy as an example of "the racist convictions common to most early twentieth century Europeans."⁴⁸

Belgian colonial rule broke down most of Rwanda's organized state apparatus when, through indirect rule, they introduced money, forced labour to

⁴⁴ Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 42

⁴⁵ Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 42

⁴⁶ Des Forges, "Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda."

⁴⁷ Des Forges, "Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda."

⁴⁸ Des Forges, "Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda."

build roads, and a Western education system.⁴⁹ In the 1930s – despite pledging to ensure “freedom of speech and religion for its colonies” – the Belgians introduced racial ‘identity cards’ that divided the Rwandan population into three distinct “races”⁵⁰ and solidified ideas of racialized differences between Tutsi and Hutu. Every adult Rwandan was obligated to register with the government and identify whether they were Hutu, Tutsi or Twa at the time of their birth.⁵¹ This process soon became part of a national census in 1933, which was used to classify the entire population of Rwanda. Melvern writes:

Every Rwandan was counted and measured: the height, the length of their noses, the shape their eyes. Everyone was classified: the Tutsi were taller, the Hutu were shorter and broader, although for many Rwandans it was not possible to determine ethnicity on the basis of physical appearance.⁵²

Des Forges suggests that physical characteristics separated some of the Tutsi from the Hutu, but a genealogical recording was considered more accurate.⁵³ The racially-obsessed European explorers analyzed the physical characteristics of these three apparent ‘tribes’ and designated their new social hierarchy based on appearance. If the Belgians were going to limit access to employment and higher administrative posts and education to the Tutsi, they had to figure out who exactly was Tutsi and who was Hutu.

⁴⁹ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 5.

⁵⁰ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁵¹ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁵² Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 11

⁵³ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

The Belgian rule over the Rwandans continued until the late 1950s, when the Hutu began to rebel against the subservient colonial status. In 1957, Hutu leaders published the “Hutu Manifesto,” which called for the end of the Tutsi dominance over the majority, and suggested that the main problem in Rwanda was “Tutsi supremacy.”⁵⁴ Many of the Hutu believed in the premise that the Tutsi were “not really Rwandans at all”—fuelled by the history of eugenics-inspired divisions—so their postcolonial image of Rwanda meant both an end to Belgian colonization and freedom from Tutsi rule.⁵⁵ Shortly after the publication of the Hutu manifesto in 1957 by the Hutu Emancipation Movement, which later became the Parmehutu political party, the UN anticipated a “rapprochement between the races,” and the Belgians were called in to help calm down the growing tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi.⁵⁶ In reality, the Belgians did not help put out the flames in what was essentially a “Belgian-assisted coup,”⁵⁷ and the 1957 manifesto maintained that the biggest problem in Rwanda was Tutsi supremacy. In 1959, the manifesto gained traction, especially after the death of the Rwandan King, so the Tutsis—who subsequently repelled the emerging Hutu leadership—blamed his death on the Belgians and the Hutu extremists.⁵⁸ In November of 1959, ethnic violence “erupted” in Rwanda, and thousands of Tutsi died on the one side of the ethnic “fault line.”⁵⁹ In 1959, after Belgian authorities began to comply with the majority Hutu and removed Tutsi from the powerful

⁵⁴ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 6

⁵⁵ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 6

⁵⁶ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁵⁷ Lemarchand, “The 1994 Rwanda Genocide,” 397.

⁵⁸ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 6

⁵⁹ Lemarchand, “The 1994 Rwanda Genocide,” 397.

positions in the country, thousands of Tutsi were killed in conflicts and thousands of others fled to neighboring countries like Uganda. The 1959 massacres of the Tutsi was described by the UN General Assembly as “Nazism against the Tutsi minority,”⁶⁰ and became one of the first of “several alleged genocides”⁶¹ against the Tutsi minority.

The relationship between the Hutu and Belgians grew more difficult, especially after the UN called on the Belgians to “emancipate the down trodden Hutu.”⁶² On July 1, 1961,⁶³ following the 1960 and 1961 presidential elections that were both won by the Parmehutu political party—the party that exclusively identified with the Hutu—eighty percent of the Rwandan parliament voted to end the connection to their country’s monarchy and separated their ties to Belgium. Together, these events are known as the “Hutu Revolution,”⁶⁴ and Rwanda independence was born in July 1962. Immediately following the revolution, in 1963, Rwanda faced new massacres that some scholars characterize as a precursor to the events of 1994. Melvern explains, “the element of planned annihilation links the killings in 1963 to the genocide of 1994. The planning and the methods used, thirty years apart, are similar.”⁶⁵

After 1963, Des Forges suggests that the same identity cards that once “served to guarantee privilege to Tutsi” became, instead, a means to discriminate against them.⁶⁶ She writes:

⁶⁰ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 6.

⁶¹ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 6.

⁶² Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 6.

⁶³ Lemarchand, “The 1994 Rwanda Genocide,” 397.

⁶⁴ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁶⁵ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 17.

⁶⁶ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

Hutu used the ideas once prized by the Tutsi—ideas about Tutsi distinctiveness, foreign origins, and complete control over the Hutu—to justify the violence of the revolution and the discriminatory measures of the years after.⁶⁷

In 1952, 17.5% of the population in Rwanda was Tutsi, but by 1991, the Tutsi represented only 8.4% of the population; a result of massacres, forced exile, and instances where Tutsi illicitly redefined themselves as Hutu.

In 1973, following a military coup, General Juvenal Habyarimana became the president of Rwanda promising to “restore order and national unity.”⁶⁸ Habyarimana’s single party control under the National Revolutionary Movement for Development constructed what Des Forges calls a “cohesive monolith.”⁶⁹ However, there were still Rwandan Tutsis who were forced to live in exile throughout the 1970s; some estimates put the Tutsi refugee figures at close to 2 million people.⁷⁰ In 1979, the first organized counter group was established in a refugee community in Uganda—the Rwandan Refugees Welfare Association (RRWA), which soon evolved into the Rwandan Alliance for National Unity (RANU)—and they started the push for a right of return to Rwanda.⁷¹ In 1987, while following a mandate dedicated to the return of the refugees to Rwanda, the independent group, RANU, changed its name one more time to three letters that became well-known over the following 10 years: the RPF - The Rwandan Patriotic Front.

⁶⁷ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁶⁸ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁶⁹ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁷⁰ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁷¹ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 26.

The formation of the RPF and the 1990 RPF invasion was described as "a crisis of postcolonial citizenship" because of the years of being viewed and repressed as something invented by the previous colonizers.⁷² The Hutu revolution "planted the seeds of the refugee-warrior militancy,"⁷³ and the RPF representatives suggested that it was important to invade the country because they felt that "the repression [against the Tutsi] in Rwanda could only get worse."⁷⁴ On October 1, 1990, the RPF invaded Rwanda and attempted to take immediate possession of the weapons supplies in the country.⁷⁵ Along with the invasion, the RPF requested democratization, social services, the elimination of corruption and an "end to Rwanda's ethnic divide and the system of compulsory identity cards."⁷⁶ Melvern suggests that the invasion ended in a "disaster" because "nothing went to plan" on the second day when one of the RPF leaders, Fred Rwigyema, was killed.⁷⁷ After the invasion, the RPF was pushed back to a heavily forested volcanic mountain range in the Northwest area of Rwanda where the group essentially fell apart. However, shortly after the failed invasion from the outside, Paul Kagame returned to Rwanda to lead the RPF after partaking in military training at the US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.⁷⁸ Kagame later became an important part of the RPF during the 1994 genocide, and, in 2000, he became the sixth president of Rwanda.

⁷² Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 36.

⁷³ Lemarchand, "The 1994 Rwanda Genocide," 398.

⁷⁴ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 28.

⁷⁵ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 28

⁷⁶ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 29

⁷⁷ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 29.

⁷⁸ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 29

After the 1990 RPF invasion, there was an obvious panic by the Hutu and those in political positions throughout Kigali, and the Rwandan government focused its efforts on buying weapons. Egypt was one of the key resources for obtaining weapons,⁷⁹ and the arms deal remained relatively secret, primarily because international powers attempted to prevent the 1990 civil war between the RPF and the Rwandan government forces.⁸⁰ The forceful and strong-handed movements by Rwanda's president, Habyarimana, reinforced the image of a "repressive regime"—which even moved some of the dissatisfied Hutu over to the RPF.⁸¹ In fact, by the time any serious talks began to happen with the RPF in regards to a cease-fire, the Rwandan army had grown to 30,000 soldiers.⁸² Over the three years of sporadic fighting between the RPF and the Rwandan government, the RPF was not able to broaden its political base, and the civil war inevitably divided society towards more extreme political and economic instability.⁸³ The civil war had a "devastating effect on Rwanda"—especially considering the fact that it was displacing thousands of refugees every day to neighbouring countries.⁸⁴

The French government also highlighted another early warning about the growing crisis in Rwanda, and they focused on the inner circle of power surrounding Agathe Habyarimana—the president's wife. The French feared that a very distinct racist ideology—suggesting that the Hutu were a superior race—

⁷⁹ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 31

⁸⁰ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 32

⁸¹ Des Forges, "Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda."

⁸² Des Forges, "Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda."

⁸³ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 39

⁸⁴ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 39

had not just erupted “as a consequence of the RPF invasion,” but they had a feeling that this ideology “had been nurtured for decades.”⁸⁵ Just like the genocide, a root cause of the civil war was fueled by the fact that individuals had been identified, “mythologized and manipulated for political advantage.”⁸⁶ The situation in Rwanda in the early ‘90s was “no secret” and human rights groups used the word “genocide” to describe “massacres of Tutsi in the northern prefectures of Gisenyi and Ruhengeri.”⁸⁷ However, despite the warnings of growing tension and genocide, the international community remained apathetic. In fact, the massacres prior to 1994 were essentially done using some of “the same methods used in the 1994 genocide”—using machetes and other common ‘tools’—in a kind of “dress rehearsal.”⁸⁸

In 1993, the Hutu and the RPF negotiated a series of peace and power-sharing agreements known as the Arusha Accords,⁸⁹ which were developed in Arusha, Tanzania.⁹⁰ At the same time as they talked about peace, the Rwandan government was importing thousands of machetes and other agricultural tools in 18 separate deals with companies primarily from China.⁹¹ In 1993 alone, Rwanda imported 581,175 kg of machetes at a cost of \$725,669, which did not include the “agricultural tools” like axes, screwdrivers, saws, knives, pliers, scissors, hammers, etc. These “tools”—which were later used as weapons—were purchased at \$4.6 million from a company called Oriental Machinery Incorporated

⁸⁵ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 43

⁸⁶ Lemarchand, “The 1994 Rwanda Genocide,” 398.

⁸⁷ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 44

⁸⁸ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 18

⁸⁹ The Arusha Accords were a comprehensive settlement between the RPF and the government of Kigali signed on August 4, 1993.

⁹⁰ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

⁹¹ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 56

in Beijing, which was owned by Felicien Kabuga—a main financier of the anti-Tutsi propaganda radio station, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM).⁹² AK-47s also became a popular import and helped move Rwanda—one of the poorest countries in the world in 1993—to becoming the third-largest importer of weapons in Africa.⁹³ However, while all of the weapons were being imported, Rwanda’s economy was under control by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, so why didn’t the international community notice the suspicious pattern?⁹⁴ Stephen Goose and Frank Smyth suggest that the international community often ignores the transfer of light conventional weapons that are responsible for the majority of the killings of civilians and combatants because they are “concentrating instead on the dangers of nuclear arms proliferation.”⁹⁵ In fact, what is more disturbing, is the realization that more than a dozen nations, including countries that were part of the former Warsaw Pact, “helped fuel the Rwandan war,” because of the fact that “both sides appear to have purchased considerable weaponry through private sources on the open market.”⁹⁶ If the international community decided to control the flow of light weapons and other arms into Rwanda, some scholars, such as Goose and Smyth, suggest that the outcome of the genocide “would have been different.”⁹⁷

In late 1993 and early 1994, many of the international agencies in Rwanda grew concerned about the possibility of a large number of casualties if

⁹² Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 56

⁹³ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 56

⁹⁴ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 57

⁹⁵ Stephen Goose and Frank Smyth, “Arming Genocide in Rwanda,” *Foreign Affairs* 5 (1994): 86.

⁹⁶ Goose and Smyth, “Arming Genocide in Rwanda,” 89.

⁹⁷ Goose and Smyth, “Arming Genocide in Rwanda,” 89.

the Arusha Accords did not successfully maintain the peace.⁹⁸ Despite attempting to publicly express his concerns about what was developing in Rwanda, Maj. Gen. Romeo Dallaire – commander of a UN Chapter 6⁹⁹ observation mission in Rwanda in October 1993 – did not have support from the UN Security Council.¹⁰⁰ Based on intelligence from a Hutu informant, Gen. Dallaire planned an arms seizure in Kigali in early January. On January 11, 1994, Dallaire sent the UN Security Council what later became known as the “genocide fax,”¹⁰¹ a heavy worded letter detailing that Rwanda was heading for a conflict of massive proportions.¹⁰² In response, the UN Security Council – on which Rwanda was then sitting as a rotating member – reiterated that while they understood there were difficulties in Rwanda, they were not expecting the Security Council to receive a “catalog of these problems,”¹⁰³ so the mission needed to remain focused on the implementation of the peace agreement.

Scholars like Helen Hintjens acknowledge that both “precolonial legacies and colonial policies contributed to the formation of [the Rwandan] state”¹⁰⁴ but it was also the increasingly “autocratic and unpopular government” that Habyarimana was running at the beginning of the 1990s that revealed a “last-ditch attempt at survival”¹⁰⁵ by executing the genocide in 1994. Habyarimana’s government did not suddenly plan the genocide on April 6—it had a long history

⁹⁸ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 101

⁹⁹ Chapter 6 only enables intervention through peaceful means: mediation, negotiation, arbitration, etc.

¹⁰⁰ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 101

¹⁰¹ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 100

¹⁰² Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 100

¹⁰³ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 89

¹⁰⁴ Helen Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies: Cambridge University Press* (1999): 241.

¹⁰⁵ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 241.

of development with political interest—but, as Hintjens acknowledges, there are three broad explanations for the genocide:

A focus on external influences, both colonial and neo-colonial; a focus on domestic causes, including demographic factors and “ethnic” conflict; and a psychosocial account based on the presumed social conformism and obedience of Rwandans.¹⁰⁶

Unfortunately, as Rwanda moved towards genocide, the international media was not able to provide any context for the increasing unrest and the genocidal plans. The world primarily portrayed the Rwandan conflict as “resulting from ethnic tensions.”¹⁰⁷

The 1994 Genocide

On the evening of April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana, who had been the president of Rwanda since 1973, was delayed in Dar-es-Salaam for a summit. Even though he rarely traveled anywhere at night for security reasons, he flew home that evening in his Mystere Falcon 50 airplane.¹⁰⁸ At 8:23 PM, just as Habyarimana, his closest advisers, private doctors, private secretary, personal security, chief of the Army, and the President of Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira, were cleared to land at the Kigali airport, the plane was struck by two ground-to-air missiles, which killed everyone on board and scattered the wreckage of the

¹⁰⁶ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 243.

¹⁰⁷ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 248.

¹⁰⁸ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 115.

plane throughout the garden of the presidential palace.¹⁰⁹ A French judicial report—released in January 2012—exonerated the RPF and Paul Kagame after it suggested the missiles were fired by a Hutu rebel group associated with the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (the MRND).¹¹⁰

The first few hours following the airplane crash were quite hectic because the assassination was followed by a government troop implementation of roadblocks throughout Kigali as the city witnessed sporadic gunfire and explosions.¹¹¹ Kigali was certainly not the only area of the country to witness the deployment of checkpoints because, elsewhere in Rwanda, people “armed to the teeth” had reinforced checkpoints and cars were passing through them full of “people with machetes.”¹¹² The killing of Tutsi and moderate Hutu political oppositional figures began moments after the crash, which was based on two “categories”:

(a) moderate (as distinct from “Hutu power”) Hutu politicians from the south/central regions, most of them affiliated to the Movement Democratique Republicain (MDR), and (b) opposition leaders (Hutu and Tutsi) identified with the Parti Liberal (PL) or the Parti Social Democratique (PSD).¹¹³

Sensing that a new crisis was unfolding after receiving a telephone call from the prime minister regarding the president’s death, Dallaire issued a “red alert” for all

¹⁰⁹ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 115.

¹¹⁰ “Rwanda genocide: Kagame ‘cleared of Habyarimana crash’,” *BBC World News*, January 10, 2012. Accessed January 20, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16472013>

¹¹¹ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 136.

¹¹² Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 116.

¹¹³ Rene Lemarchand, “Rwanda: The Rationality of Genocide,” *A Journal of Opinion* 2 (1995): 8-11.

of the United Nations Assistance Mission In Rwanda (UNAMIR) peacekeepers in the country, which meant doubling security and making the wearing of flak jackets compulsory.¹¹⁴ In a matter of hours, the first two “categories” were completely disposed of, which then left the death squads to the task of killing the Tutsi civilians. The killing of Tutsi civilians immediately revealed the “sufficiency of the machete wielding death squads” because of the “swiftness” of the horribly “rational” carnage.¹¹⁵ It was systematic killing and “the killings were not in any way clean or surgical...the use of machetes often resulted in a long and painful agony.”¹¹⁶ As one critic of the government in Kicukiro expressed immediately upon witnessing the early killings: “It was clear massacres were about to begin.”¹¹⁷ It was clear because of the people driving through roadblocks with cars full of machetes, the propaganda being broadcast over radio, and the fact that things were happening very quickly, “as if they had been rehearsed.” Many eyewitnesses, at the time, believed that the growing violence in Rwanda would escalate and end tragically.¹¹⁸

According to Gregory Stanton, “the diplomatic community knew about the crimes” being committed in February and March of 1994 through various cables from the US Embassy and cables from Dallaire—on top of the reports that station RTLM—a government controlled pro-Hutu institution—was broadcasting “inflammatory statements calling for hatred – indeed for extermination”—so the

¹¹⁴ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 136.

¹¹⁵ Lemarchand, “Rwanda: The Rationality of Genocide,” 11.

¹¹⁶ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 255.

¹¹⁷ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 136.

¹¹⁸ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 118.

news of the massacres on April 6 should not have been overly surprising.¹¹⁹ Despite many of the early warnings, when the “feared bloodshed” began hours after President Habyarimana’s death, UNAMIR was completely unprepared to confront the “wave of terror unleashed by the Hutu extremists.”¹²⁰ The new purpose of these UN troops—which disregarded Gen. Dallaire’s plea for more than help on the ground to save expatriates and the Rwandan civilians —was to evacuate expatriates from what was the news media characterized as “chaos,” renewed civil war, and “tribal fighting.”¹²¹ For UNAMIR, the increasingly “untenable tasks”¹²² of protecting themselves and civilians under the Chapter VI mandate became immediately apparent when 10 Belgian peacekeepers were murdered during the first phase of violence. However, the reality of the situation on the ground was not tribal fighting but genocide, and foreign leaders were well aware of it.¹²³ The member states that were contributing troops to the UNAMIR operation adamantly said that they “could not afford to place the lives of their people in the hands of a cavalier UN” and the Security Council voted to reduce the role of UNAMIR because no country was willing to contribute troops to an expanded mandate or operation.¹²⁴ On April 9, 1994, Belgian and French troops landed at the Kigali airport to rescue and evacuate foreigners from the country, and the UN headquarters informed Dallaire that: “only for the rescue of foreigners

¹¹⁹ Gregory Stanton, “Could the Rwandan genocide have been prevented?” *Journal of Genocide Research* 2 (2004): 212.

¹²⁰ Michael Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” *Cultural Anthropology* 4 (1997): 551.

¹²¹ Mark Doyle, “Reporting the Genocide,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 150.

¹²² Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 558.

¹²³ Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 558.

¹²⁴ Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 559.

could he exceed his mandate and use force.”¹²⁵ On April 11, 1994, just days after the plane crash, 3900 people of 22 nationalities were evacuated from Rwanda, and every international embassy, except for China’s, was evacuated and closed—including France’s, which left behind “a staggering pile of shredded paper” to hide the “French links with the extremists.”¹²⁶ The French link was controversial when they sent back peacekeeping forces in the middle of June, but on April 11 1994, Rwanda was essentially abandoned.

During the first two days of the genocide, the Interahamwe militia—which was formed in 1991 as a “youth group” version of Habyarimana’s MRND¹²⁷—were being collected from all parts of Rwanda in “commandeered vehicles” to distribute weapons, including grenades and Kalashnikov assault rifles.¹²⁸ The headquarters for the Interahamwe, which was previously known as the Ministry of Youth in Kigali, was moved to Gisenyi by the militia leader, Bernard Munyagishari, shortly after its conception.¹²⁹ The testimony of informer and former militia leader, Omar Serushago—outlined after the genocide in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) courtroom—that the plans for genocide in Gisenyi were “more advanced than anywhere else”¹³⁰ in Rwanda. In fact, there were six groups of Interahamwe in Gisenyi, and every evening during the genocide they would meet together and report on the Tutsi who had been murdered that day.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 181.

¹²⁶ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 187.

¹²⁷ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 26.

¹²⁸ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 168.

¹²⁹ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 169.

¹³⁰ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 169.

¹³¹ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 169.

Linda Melvern also points out that there were “sounds of screams and gunfire”¹³² all over Kigali and Gikondo, and it continued out into the countryside. The Interahamwe were hunting for Tutsis, breaking down doors, and chasing people from house to house. On April 12, Jean Philippe Ceppi, a journalist for the French newspaper *Liberation*, described seeing piles of dead mutilated bodies that had had their breasts and penises removed by machetes by the Interahamwe in Gikondo.¹³³ People were also not even safe in hospitals, where the Interahamwe chased Tutsi around the wards. At the end of the chase, there were so many dead bodies being delivered to the city morgue that they had to be stacked outside.¹³⁴

One of the main instructional tools for the Interahamwe was the use of the Rwandan radio station Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM).¹³⁵ The RTLM station “actively encouraged them to kill, relentlessly sending the message that the Tutsi were the enemy and had to be eliminated once and for all.”¹³⁶ The MRND party, which was led by Juvenal Habyarimana, owned RTLM and was the group in charge of the Interahamwe.¹³⁷

Throughout April the only thing that deterred or slowed down the killings were the few military operations by the RPF, or when the Tutsi population had been completely obliterated in a particular area. Unfortunately, as Prunier suggests, Gen. Dallaire and UNAMIR’s troops were “completely useless because

¹³² Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 137.

¹³³ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 137.

¹³⁴ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 137.

¹³⁵ ICTR, “The Verdict: Summary Judgment from the Media Trial,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 284.

¹³⁶ ICTR, “The Verdict: Summary Judgment from the Media Trial,” 284.

¹³⁷ ICTR, “The Verdict: Summary Judgment from the Media Trial,” 284.

their mandate prevented them from intervening.”¹³⁸ Dallaire’s intervention proposal, on the other hand, pushed for adoption under Chapter VII, as opposed to a Chapter VI observation mission, because it would involve force directed to stop the genocide, conduct a peace enforcement mission, assist in the return of refugees and displaced persons, ensure the successful delivery of humanitarian aid and assist in a cessation of hostilities.¹³⁹ The United States consistently argued that the UN had an obligation to “protect the lives of the peacekeepers and that the failure to do so would make it harder to obtain troops for future operations and, perhaps, further the decline in the UN’s reputation.”¹⁴⁰ So, on April 21, 1994, rather than bolstering the mission or altering its mandate, the Security Council decided to withdraw the bulk of UNAMIR and left a “skeletal force” of 450¹⁴¹ to help Commander Gen. Romeo Dallaire somehow broker a cease-fire agreement between the RPF and the Rwandan government,¹⁴² which did not help the innocent civilians and noncombatants being slaughtered. U.S. Colonel, Scott Feil, suggests that the implementation of the 5000 troops Dallaire requested between April 7 and April 21, 1994, would have “significantly altered the outcome of the conflict.”¹⁴³ A minority of others, such as Alan Kuperman, a controversial scholar known for his critical stance on humanitarian military

¹³⁸ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 261.

¹³⁹ Scott Feil, “Preventing Genocide: How the Early Use of Force Might Have Succeeded in Rwanda,” *A Report to the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1998): 8.

¹⁴⁰ Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 560.

¹⁴¹ Feil, “Preventing Genocide: How the Early Use of Force Might Have Succeeded in Rwanda,” 9.

¹⁴² Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 560.

¹⁴³ Feil, “Preventing Genocide: How the Early Use of Force Might Have Succeeded in Rwanda,” 3.

intervention, claim that “a realistic intervention could not have prevented the genocide.”¹⁴⁴

Almost immediately after making a decision to withdraw UNAMIR troops, the UN and the Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, decided to “revisit” the decision, which Michael Barnett suggests was done because they were “highly embarrassed” on an international level from their previous decision.¹⁴⁵ The Security Council unveiled another plan at the end of April that created an image that the UN was “poised for action” but the U.S. agreed that it probably would not have brought an end to the genocide, which is reflected in the United States’ immediate criticism.¹⁴⁶ The revisited decision to send 5000 troops to Kigali was sent back to the drawing board again to sit and wait until late June – in the final days of the genocide – when the UN authorized a French operation in southern Rwanda to protect refugees.¹⁴⁷

On April 24, 1994, Oxfam, the international aid organization, described the crisis in Rwanda as genocide¹⁴⁸ while western politicians and most of the international media were describing it as “ethnic cleansing” and “tribal warfare.” However, as Dallaire points out, “calling it ethnic cleansing just did not hit the mark,” so he began using the word genocide on his records after April 24. Likewise, the Pope condemned the violence in Rwanda on April 27 by using the word “genocide”¹⁴⁹ to describe the massacre, which was widely quoted in the

¹⁴⁴ Alan Kuperman, *The Limits to Humanitarian Intervention* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2001): VIII.

¹⁴⁵ Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 560.

¹⁴⁶ Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 560.

¹⁴⁷ Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 561

¹⁴⁸ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, 216.

¹⁴⁹ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

western news media. On April 29, UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, acknowledged that the killing in Rwanda was “distinct from the war, although related to it,”¹⁵⁰ but setting a plan in motion to end the atrocities to deliver peacekeepers was not there until July.

Genocide or the “g-word,” as Stanton outlines, was certainly a sore spot for the U.S. government and policymakers that did not want to get involved in an African ‘civil war’ or another ‘quagmire’ after Somalia.¹⁵¹ Indeed, the looping CNN coverage of American UN peacekeepers dragged through the streets of Somalia after the “Blackhawk Down” incident in 1993, resulted in President Clinton’s Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD 25), signed on May 3, 1994, and designed to limit the United States’ involvement in UN peacekeeping operations.¹⁵² PDD 25 allowed intervention in cases of “genocide,”¹⁵³ but insisted that any UN peacekeeping intervention must be in the interests of the US. As long as the US ignored or denied the fact that genocide was indeed taking place in Rwanda, they avoided their “moral duty to intervene.”¹⁵⁴ Article 8 of the Genocide Convention states that “Contracting Parties *may* call upon the competent organs of the U.N.,”¹⁵⁵ but it does not outline any particular legal obligation for a country to take action outside of their own national legislation. After months of legal advisors telling the American government not to call the Rwandan killings genocide, on June 10, 1994—on the same day that the *New*

¹⁵⁰ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

¹⁵¹ Stanton, “Could the Rwandan genocide have been prevented?” 7.

¹⁵² Stanton, “Could the Rwandan genocide have been prevented?,” 7.

¹⁵³ Stanton, “Could the Rwandan genocide have been prevented?,” 7.

¹⁵⁴ Stanton, “Could the Rwandan genocide have been prevented?,” 7.

¹⁵⁵ UN General Assembly. *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 9 December 1948, United Nations, Treaty Series, 78, 277, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b3ac0.html>

*York Times*¹⁵⁶ ridiculed the government for avoiding Rwanda—the United States Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, finally called the massacres in Rwanda genocide.¹⁵⁷ By that point, the bulk of the killing was already over.

On June 18, 1994, the French sent in *Operation Turquoise*, which was able to save more than 10,000 people living in western Rwanda. However, at the same time, it also permitted the leaders of the genocide to escape into Zaire.¹⁵⁸ Operation Turquoise was also obviously not able to completely stop the slaughter because roughly 80% of the victims of the genocide—close to 800,000 people—had been killed between the second week of April and the third week of May.¹⁵⁹ Despite the lives saved by the operation, Operation Turquoise also met a considerable amount of criticism from General Dallaire, as well as the RPF leader, Paul Kagame.¹⁶⁰ Kagame described the mission as “treacherous” because the French had a significant role in training the presidential guards and supplying the Interahamwe, Hutu extremists, with training and weapons in the past.¹⁶¹

On Friday, July 1, just as the English Tutsi led RPF was about to take control of Kigali after a military victory, the French informed the United Nations that they would be setting up a safe zone in southwestern Rwanda, which was initiated after they found 10,000 bodies and 400 sick and frail Tutsis emerging

¹⁵⁶ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

¹⁵⁷ Stanton, “Could the Rwandan genocide have been prevented?,” 8.

¹⁵⁸ Gerard Prunier, “Operation Turquoise: A Humanitarian Escape,” in *The Path of a Genocide*, ed. Howard Adelman, et al. (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2000): 303.

¹⁵⁹ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 261.

¹⁶⁰ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 212.

¹⁶¹ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 212.

from a forest in Bisesero.¹⁶² One of the main motivations behind the implementation of the “secure humanitarian zone” was the fact that the French and the RPF were on the verge of a conflict between each other at the beginning of July, which certainly played well for the Interahamwe, the genocidal Hutu militia, who were trying to keep the RPF out of Kigali.¹⁶³ Part of the conflict between the French and the RPF arose because of the support that the French military was supplying the interim Rwandan government. The interim government support was quickly revoked on July 15 when the French government informed the French representative in Goma, Yannick Gerard, that “the authorities bear a heavy responsibility for the genocide,” and that “France will make no accommodation with the killers and their commanders.”¹⁶⁴

On July 18, 1994, the RPF took over Gisenyi, the genocide ended, and a new Rwandan government—composed mainly of RPF members—was formed in Kigali, which “was an attempt at some sort of normalization for first time since 6 April.”¹⁶⁵ During the previous three months, the country had seen more than ten percent of its population killed and another thirty percent of its population sent into exile, which left Rwanda “in a complete state of disarray.”¹⁶⁶ Between April 6, 1994 and July 18, 1994, there were roughly 333 1/3 deaths per hour, and 5 ½ deaths per minute—greater than five times that of the killing during the Holocaust and committed with machetes.¹⁶⁷ The Rwandan genocide was in no way a brief

¹⁶² Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 214.

¹⁶³ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

¹⁶⁴ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

¹⁶⁵ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 299.

¹⁶⁶ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 299.

¹⁶⁷ Barnett, “Security Council Indifference and Genocide in Rwanda,” 1.

incident of “tribal warfare” or “civil war,” and despite close to one million deaths, the international community and western news media broadcasters often ignored and misreported it.

The Media and the Genocide

Many media and genocide scholars who identify as “interventionists”—those who support humanitarian intervention—have suggested—through studying the impact of the media on the Rwandan genocide—that the “media have a responsibility to alert the world to circumstances such as Rwanda early, loud, and unwaveringly.”¹⁶⁸ Steven Livingston, Gerard Prunier, Linda Melvern, Richard Dowden, Allan Thompson and Amanda Grzyb agree that the media coverage of the Rwandan genocide was poorly executed, inaccurate, and one of the reasons why the international community turned a blind eye to the genocide as it was happening. However, those who identify with Livingston’s term “realists,”¹⁶⁹ anti-interventionists believe that international media is “fickle, shifting from one crisis to the next,”¹⁷⁰ and do not have a direct impact on government policy and foreign intervention in situations of crisis.

Livingston suggests that the US media’s portrayal of international crises is “fleeting, ephemeral and all too typically frivolous.”¹⁷¹

Media content is heavily laden with emotional freight concerning distant injustices and brewing evil. In populating the news with

¹⁶⁸ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 189.

¹⁶⁹ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 189.

¹⁷⁰ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 189.

¹⁷¹ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 189.

victims of one sort or another, calculations of national interest are supplanted by mere sentimentality. This is the core principle at the heart of the realist critique of the media and foreign policymaking.¹⁷²

However, as Kennan, Kurtz, Patterson and Livingston suggest,¹⁷³ one of the main reasons why the American media does not have a significant impact on foreign policymaking is because it focuses on entertainment stories instead of ‘real’ news. Between 1990 and 1998, American news networks “more than doubled” the time given to celebrity/entertainment stories, disasters, accidents and crime, which they did while “decreasing the time spent on policy and international affairs.”¹⁷⁴ Livingston’s systematic analysis of American news media shows that until September 2001, international news took up a small portion of the nightly news broadcast because all three American news networks were devoting a third of their broadcasts to the stories that fell into the category of “lifestyle, features and crime.”¹⁷⁵ As Steven Livingston outlines in his studies on American television news, over roughly a twenty-year period—between 1972 and 1991—40% of American television news content focused, in some way, on international events.¹⁷⁶ At the end of the Cold War, as Livingston suggests, American news media changed their focus drastically to other more profitable issues, which was driven by the neoliberal ideology developed during the Reagan

¹⁷² Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 190.

¹⁷³ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 190.

¹⁷⁴ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 190.

¹⁷⁵ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 190.

¹⁷⁶ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 190.

and Bush era.¹⁷⁷ After 1991, domestic news content made its way onto American news networks for 73% of the stories, and during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, only one in four news network stories were concerned about international events.¹⁷⁸

The limited international coverage in the spring of 1994 was focused on the military coup and the civil unrest in Haiti, which led to refugees fleeing to Florida; the South African elections, which Nelson Mandela won; and the civil war in Bosnia, which received a significant amount of attention in April and May.¹⁷⁹ Not only were these international stories competing with each other—as was the case during the summer of 1994—humanitarian crises are often eclipsed by news that is more ‘entertaining’ in nature. For example, climaxing on June 17 1994, the O.J. Simpson story and images of him driving down the freeway in his white bronco received more attention than any other news story and “more American network news coverage than the systematic murder of over 800,000 people.”¹⁸⁰ It was not until late July or August when the international media turned towards Rwanda, but at that point, the stories were primarily centered on the thousands of Hutu refugees suffering from malnutrition and cholera in Zaire.

In retrospect, the Western media in general often blame the international community for their poor initial response to the genocide, but as Alan Kuperman points out, the media also needs to share the blame for their inability to recognize

¹⁷⁷ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 190.

¹⁷⁸ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 190.

¹⁷⁹ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 192.

¹⁸⁰ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 194.

and accurately report the carnage on the ground in Rwanda.¹⁸¹ In a report for the Foreign Press Institute, Kuperman highlights the “four lapses” that many journalists committed during the first weeks of the Rwandan genocide. Firstly, the news media misunderstood the actions in Rwanda as a “civil war,” which was clearly influenced by the history of war that Rwanda experienced during 1959, 1963, 1990, and 1993. However, the mass violence that broke across Rwanda on April 7 was very different than the civil unrest in the 1960s and the Tutsi refugee rebel invasion in the 1990s.¹⁸² The second major “lapse” that Kuperman reveals is that many news media outlets were reporting that the violence in Rwanda was beginning to get better into the second week of the genocide, when, in fact, it was actually getting much worse. For example, *The New York Times* claimed that violence “appeared to slacken” and *Le Monde* expressed that the fighting had “diminished in intensity.”¹⁸³ The third error made by international media outlets and their coverage of Rwanda pertains to the death counts, which were often quite inaccurate and misleading. The death counts were routinely underestimated, especially considering that the media estimates during the second week did not change and groups like *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* often repeated statistics days after they were printed.¹⁸⁴ The fourth and last mistake is the Western news organizations’ decision to focus almost entirely on what was happening in Kigali during the genocide, which really only affected four per cent of Rwanda’s population and inevitably left the overwhelming

¹⁸¹ Alan Kuperman, “How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007): 256.

¹⁸² Kuperman, “How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide,” 254.

¹⁸³ Kuperman, “How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide,” 257.

¹⁸⁴ Kuperman, “How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide,” 257.

majority of other tragedies that were happening all around them unreported.¹⁸⁵

For example, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* suggested that there was “much of the country [in] chaos” and “sketchy reports said fighting has spread to Rwanda’s countryside,” which both alluded to the fact that the genocide had spread elsewhere into the country, but very little was elaborated beyond those points.¹⁸⁶

Justifying the poor coverage of the genocide has been difficult for many journalists, but Kuperman suggests that there are generally three major factors as to why the media failed in its coverage of Rwanda: the evacuation of foreign nationals left few reporters on the ground, the situation was legitimately confusing, and even the experts had a difficult time fully comprehending what was happening.¹⁸⁷ In fact, it was not until April 19, 1994, when Human Rights Watch suggested that Rwanda was encountering genocide, which was really the first time a North American organization expressed it publicly.¹⁸⁸ The first time the word genocide was used by the international media was on April 11 in the French newspaper *Liberation*.¹⁸⁹ However, as Amanda Grzyb suggests, it is also important for one to expand on Kuperman’s analysis to include “an examination of how the media’s images of ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ fit within the confines of Western ideas about racial and cultural differences, ‘the African’ and the supposed

¹⁸⁵ Kuperman, “How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide,” 257.

¹⁸⁶ Kuperman, “How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide,” 257.

¹⁸⁷ Kuperman, “How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide,” 258.

¹⁸⁸ Kuperman, “How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide,” 258.

¹⁸⁹ Linda Melvern, “Missing the Story: The Media and the Rwanda Genocide,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 3 (2001): 92.

'inevitability' of African suffering."¹⁹⁰ The media in the west harshly criticized the American and Western politicians for failing to help the victims of the genocide sooner, but the media outlets also share the blame because the 'news' business is often looked to as a "surrogate early warning system."¹⁹¹

Conclusion

In the next chapter, I begin by revealing that the ABC, CBS and NBC television news coverage was really unaware of the context of the 1994 genocide. The history of Rwanda is certainly somewhat complex, but that does not justify the reliance on stereotypes and the overall ignorance when the networks were unaware of what was happening. Unfortunately, ABC, CBS and NBC did not begin to realize the severity of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda until the end of July, after hundreds of thousands of people were killed.

¹⁹⁰ Grzyb, "Media Coverage, Activism and Creating Public Will for Intervention in Rwanda and Darfur," 68.

¹⁹¹ Kuperman, "How the Media missed the Rwanda Genocide," 258.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FIRST 24 DAYS: APRIL 6, 1994 - APRIL 30, 1994

Scholars from a variety of disciplines, including Steven Livingston, Allan Thompson, Linda Melvern, Alison Des Forges, and Amanda Grzyb, have criticized corporate media organizations for their response to the first month of the Rwandan genocide. They suggest that the coverage was inaccurate as well as "fleeting, ephemeral and all too typically frivolous"¹⁹² during a critical window for a Chapter VII military peacekeeping intervention.¹⁹³ In short, the news media contributed to the international community's failure to stop the genocide. In this chapter, I will provide an analysis of the ABC, CBS, and NBC television news coverage during the first 24 days of the Rwandan genocide. My analysis of the images and discourse employed by the American television networks demonstrates that their stories – like those published in the agenda setting newspapers – were inaccurate and contributed to the general confusion about the situation on the ground in Rwanda. In particular, the networks broadcasted stories filled with African stereotypes, comparisons to the previously failed intervention in Somalia, and egregiously false misleading information, which are important mistakes to learn from, because the way the American television media tell stories can have a distinct affect on public opinion, political intervention and the fate of those on the screen. The American television broadcasters have a lot responsibility and control over what is placed on a television screen, because, as

¹⁹² Livingston, "Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda," 189.

¹⁹³ Chapter VII refers to the 7th chapter in the *Charter of the United Nations*. It specifically addresses peacekeeping actions.

Susan Sontag suggests, “in America, the photographer is not simply the person who records the past, but the one who invents it.”¹⁹⁴ During the Rwandan genocide, the American television media invented an image of ‘tribal warfare’ and ‘civil war’.

The Context

On April 6, after a rocket-powered weapon shot down the aircraft carrying Rwandan president, Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian president, Cyprien Ntaryamira, media organizations around the world searched for information about the assassination and the massacre of Rwandan civilians that followed in its wake. In *Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, Gerard Prunier describes the first night of the genocide as chaotic and confusing:

The plane was shot down at around 8:30 PM, and by 9:15 there were already *Interahamwe* roadblocks everywhere in town and houses were being searched. This was the cause of the shooting that began to be heard less than an hour after the president's death and not any imaginary fighting with the RPF. Fantastic tales have been written about those crucial hours on the evening of Wednesday 6 April 1994.¹⁹⁵

As Prunier outlines, immediately following the plane crash, Kigali and the countryside witnessed a number of dramatic events in a very short period of time. On the night of the assassination, as Alison Des Forges suggests, “sporadic

¹⁹⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 1977): 18.

¹⁹⁵ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 223.

gunfire began almost immediately after the crash,” which initiated a trend dedicated to speed and time that continued for the rest of the genocide. With the “allegations of RPF responsibility for the crime,”¹⁹⁶ the mystery around the assassination began a chain of events that led to more “fantastic tales.”¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, despite the lack of consensus surrounding who actually assassinated Habyarimana, ‘time’ and ‘speed’ became two factors that made it difficult for the international journalists to present accurate reports, especially since they were not in the country on April 6. From the beginning, the genocide was moving very quickly and time became a major factor, which inevitably left room for the journalists to overlook important details—especially in a country about which they knew very little.

Rwanda is situated within the Central African Time zone, which is six hours ahead of the Eastern Time zone, and nine hours ahead of the Pacific Time zone.¹⁹⁸ Therefore, within the first few hours after Habyarimana’s death, the amount of information that ABC, CBS, and NBC could actually obtain was quite limited. For example, Mark Doyle, who was in Kenya working for the BBC on April 6, travelled to Uganda with a dozen other journalists after receiving word that Habyarimana’s plane had crashed in Kigali. Even after he arrived in Uganda on the 6, Doyle had difficulty understanding the scope and nature of the massacres:

¹⁹⁶ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

¹⁹⁷ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 223

¹⁹⁸ “Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook,” accessed October 16, 2010, [/library/publicationsthe-world-factbook/geos/rw.html](http://library/publicationsthe-world-factbook/geos/rw.html).

I have to admit that during the first few days, I, like others, got the story terribly wrong. Down on the ground, up close--if you get close enough, safely enough--it did look at first like chaos. I said so. I use the word chaos. What I could see clearly in the first few days was the shooting war between the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the government, and the dead bodies. It was not clear who had killed whom, not at first, and the shooting war appeared chaotic with shifting front lines, a lot of noise and a lot of red hot lead flying around.¹⁹⁹

Another journalist, Anne Chaon, who reported for Agence France-Presse (AFP) in the early days of the genocide, suggests that a lack of background knowledge and general confusion was to blame:

Most journalists are not experts in genocide. Many of them—myself included—arrived in Rwanda with very little knowledge of the country. So, it was tempting, especially at the beginning, to speak of the civil war, of these massacres as a perverse return of the old war, and to link these massacres to previous massacres since 1959. We failed to understand that the killing was something totally new, that this was not a continuity of what happened before.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Doyle, "Reporting the Genocide," 145.

²⁰⁰ Anne Chaon, "Who Failed in Rwanda, Journalists or the Media?" in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 162.

On April 6 and 7, American television broadcasters based their reports on a trickle of information coming out of Rwanda. They did not have their own correspondents on the ground, and when they did arrive on April 10 and 11, those journalists knew very little about Rwanda's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial history.

Jo Ellen Fair and Lisa Parks argue that "coverage of Rwanda's 1994 genocide was challenging" because "reporters were dropped into a region where they knew little, and where their own government advocated disinterested noninvolvement."²⁰¹ Such "disinterested noninvolvement" was evident on the evening of April 9, 1994, when *NBC Nightly News* with Brian Williams presented a two minute and fifty second piece on Rwanda that concluded by comparing the genocide to the 1993 conflict in Somalia. At the very end of the segment, Tom Pettit, an NBC reporter in Washington, explained that, "Nobody here or there wants another Somalia."²⁰² This statement was significant because, as Steven Livingston explains, "to understand American news coverage and government policy concerning the 1994 Rwanda genocide, one must begin with the 1992-93 United States intervention in Somalia."²⁰³

According to David Brunk, "Somalia was a humanitarian intervention gone horribly wrong."²⁰⁴ The Somali relief mission began in 1991 after the fall of Siad Barre's government, and was originally designed as an operation to

²⁰¹ Jo Ellen Fair and Lisa Parks, "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees," *Africa Today* 2 (2001): 36.

²⁰² "NBC Nightly News," (*New York: National Broadcasting Company*), April 9, 1994.

²⁰³ Livingston, "Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda," 189.

²⁰⁴ David Brunk, "Curing the Somalia Syndrome: Analogy, Foreign Policy Decision Making, and the Rwandan Genocide," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4 (2008): 302.

"Restore Hope."²⁰⁵ Towards the end, the mission transformed into a "state building operation," which consisted of UN troops—mainly composed of a US contingent—confronting the warlord of Mogadishu, Mohamed Farah Aideed. However, everything changed on October 3, 1993, during the Battle of Mogadishu, when an American helicopter crashed in the streets of Mogadishu after being shot down by a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) and the image of dead American soldiers being dragged through the streets landed in newspapers and on television screens all over the planet. On October 6, 1993, the Clinton administration removed all of the American forces from combat, and left a small contingent there for "self-defense." For the west, the Somalia incident was a pivotal geopolitical event that transformed the future of US foreign-policy decisions. In April 1994, Rwanda forced the US to recall, as Des Forges outlines, "the unfortunate consequences of a too assertive policy in Somalia, where the need for neutrality was ignored and failure ensued."²⁰⁶

On April 9, 1994—just seven months after the burned soldier's body was dragged through the streets of Mogadishu—the American television news networks found themselves reporting on another 'conflict' in Africa. Media coverage is often considered one of the many reasons why the Clinton administration removed itself from Somalia, but some believe that the media also played an integral role influencing the military to intervene in the Somalian humanitarian crisis in the first place. For example, as Steven Livingston suggests, many still look to "the television coverage of the horrific famine, fighting

²⁰⁵ Brunk, "Curing the Somalia Syndrome: Analogy, Foreign Policy Decision Making, and the Rwandan Genocide," 302.

²⁰⁶ Des Forges, "Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda."

and disease"²⁰⁷ because the television coverage became the trigger for the American humanitarian response that followed the pictures on the screen.

American statesman, George Kennan, explained:

There can be no question that the reason for this acceptance lies primarily with the exposure of the Somalia situation by the American media, above all, television. The reaction would have been unthinkable without this exposure. The reaction was an emotional one, occasioned by the sight of the suffering of the starving people in question.²⁰⁸

Livingston uses the term "CNN Effect" to describe how media coverage relates to political intervention and humanitarian crises. He suggests that the media can act as an "accelerant" or as "policy agenda setters" by raising "the evidence of an issue, placing it before higher-level policymakers."²⁰⁹ Therefore, because of the media's emphasis of American deaths in Somalia, a direct relationship emerged between the anti-interventionist backlash and US policy decisions six months later during the Rwanda genocide.²¹⁰ David Brunk calls the negative impact that the Somalia influence had on other policy decisions the "Somalia syndrome," which is a "powerful skepticism of 'benevolent intervention' operations in volatile humanitarian crises."²¹¹ Steven Livingston explains that the media's connection

²⁰⁷ Livingston, "Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention," 28.

²⁰⁸ George Kennan, "Through a Glass Darkly," *New York Times*, September 30, 1993, 25.

²⁰⁹ Livingston, "Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention," 2.

²¹⁰ Brunk, "Curing the Somalia Syndrome: Analogy, Foreign Policy Decision Making, and the Rwandan Genocide," 302.

²¹¹ Brunk, "Curing the Somalia Syndrome: Analogy, Foreign Policy Decision Making, and the Rwandan Genocide," 301.

to public opinion is indeed a reality of the global television age, because media, which influences politicians, can alter public opinion:

...pictures of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu revived some of the same fears and concerns evoked by Vietnam. The Clinton administration's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Somalia as soon as possible was the more immediate result. As The New York Times put it, the recent fighting "crystallized American public opinion on an issue that previously was not particularly pressing to the average citizen. And the pictures of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu seem to have made it all but impossible for Mr. Clinton to change many minds."²¹²

However, despite the ability to alter public opinion, and affect political intervention, between 1990 and 1998, the American television media devoted most of their time to "celebrity and entertainment, disasters accidents and crime, while decreasing the time spent on policy and international affairs."²¹³ From 1993 to 1995, only "one in four network news stories concerned international events."²¹⁴

²¹² Livingston, "Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention," 4.

²¹³ Livingston, "Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda," 190.

²¹⁴ Livingston, "Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda," 190.

In April 1994, NBC²¹⁵ was the only network to make any direct comparisons between Rwanda and Somalia, and in doing so, I would suggest that it participated in the “Somalia Syndrome,” and generated familiar Western stereotypes about the African continent. Brunk suggests that, “the memory and lessons derived from the United Nations’ Operation in Somalia (and the U.S. role therein) cast a haunting shadow over future peace-keeping missions, particularly during the emerging crisis in Rwanda.”²¹⁶ Alan Kuperman suggests that fears about “another Somalia” is one reason why government officials looked away:

In the wake of the Somalia debacle just six months earlier...
it is possible that U.S. officials, consciously or otherwise,
dismissed initial reports of large-scale violence in Rwanda
because such information would have raised the prospect of
another UN or U.S. humanitarian intervention that they
plainly did not want to contemplate.²¹⁷

The fear of another ‘failed state’ is constructed through language that is used to describe what was, in reality, a case of genocide. Arthur Klinghoffer writes, “descent into genocide became blurred with the civil war, and the Somalia image of a ‘failed state’ with random violence masked the actual premeditation and directing role of the Hutu extremists in the interim government.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ The other networks also made comparisons to Somalia between May and July as I outline in Chapter III

²¹⁶ Brunk, “Curing the Somalia Syndrome: Analogy, Foreign Policy Decision Making, and the Rwandan Genocide,” 302.

²¹⁷ Kuperman, *The Limits to Humanitarian Intervention*, 35.

²¹⁸ Arthur Klinghoffer, *The International Dimension of Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 10.

The myth of 'chaos' both masked the truth and augmented the reality of what was actually happening in April of 1994. Alison Des Forges of Human Rights Watch writes:

If Washington officials described the killings as 'chaos', it was in part because they saw Rwanda through the prism of Somalia. In this light, Rwanda was another "failed state," just one more of a series of political disasters on the continent. In such a case, they reasoned, any intervention would have to be large-scale and costly and would probably produce no measurable improvement anyway.²¹⁹

The indelible images from Mogadishu in October 1993 had a detrimental effect on the American political response to the Rwandan genocide, and provided a point of comparison to another "failed state" for journalists seeking a way to contextualize humanitarian intervention. The "Somalia Syndrome" was especially evident at the end of July, as I outline in Chapter III, when the American television news broadcasters repeated that the "Rwandese had a very unlucky happenstance of coming right after the international experience in Somalia"²²⁰ because "The White House wants no repeat of the disaster in Somalia."²²¹

However, not only was the American political response shaping the way in which the American television media presented stories on Rwanda, the television news media had to remember that, at the end of the day, it was a "news

²¹⁹ Des Forges, "Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda."

²²⁰ "CBS EVENING NEWS," July 16, 1994.

²²¹ "CBS EVENING NEWS," July 18, 1994.

factory,”²²² and the story on the screen needed to be able to sell, which genocide does not do well when it was competing against “soap operas and game shows.”²²³ Jean Seaton explains: “contemporary news is processed in what are really multinational news factories, and is subject to the rationalizations of the market as any other commodity.”²²⁴ Driven by the sensational and less serious ‘news’, “the institutions that produce news”—ABC, CBS, and NBC—“are themselves in turn only minor parts of a vast entertainment industry,”²²⁵ and the “news factories” inevitably play a substantial role in deciding what will be in a broadcast. Just like any other commodity, the retailer (which in this case is the television network) must cater to the wants of the viewers/consumers. Seaton writes:

Nevertheless how news of wars is constructed and sold is, more than ever, subject to the constraints of a ferociously competitive market. Stories of wars in faraway places have to attract audiences to sell to advertisers in competition with soap operas and game shows.²²⁶

With the market model driving the production of television news, American television news networks “devoted relatively little attention to the systematic extermination of nearly a million people” because the *Somalia Syndrome* does

²²² Jean Seaton, “The New ‘Ethnic’ Wars and the Media,” in *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence*, ed. Tim Allen and Jean Seaton. (London: Zed Books, 1999), 45.

²²³ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 36.

²²⁴ Seaton, “The New ‘Ethnic’ Wars and the Media,” 45.

²²⁵ Seaton, “The New ‘Ethnic’ Wars and the Media,” 45.

²²⁶ Seaton, “The New ‘Ethnic’ Wars and the Media,” 45.

not “attract audiences to sell to advertisers.”²²⁷ Instead of investing resources in the reportage of genocide in Rwanda, the television news networks attracted audiences in June with the O.J. Simpson trial. Overall, according to Livingston, “O.J. Simpson’s trial received more American network news coverage than the systematic murder of over 800 thousand people.”²²⁸

For Livingston, the “most disturbing” element is the “suggestion that the U.S. foreign policy agenda itself is at times merely a reflection of news content.”²²⁹ Former Secretary of State, James Baker, cautioned against using media reports as the basis for international policy:

All too often, television is what determines what is a crisis.

Television concluded the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the fighting in the Balkans was a crisis, and they began to cover it and cover it. And so the Clinton administration (was left) to find a way to do something. (Yet) they didn’t do that in Rwanda where the excesses were every bit as bad, if not worse. And so, you have to ask yourself, does that mean you should do foreign policy by television? Are we going to define crises according to what is covered, by what the editors decide to cover? I don’t think we should do that.

Despite Baker’s fear about how the media influences policy, it certainly occurs.

There are arguments about media’s significance as an agenda setter, and there

²²⁷ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 194.

²²⁸ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 194.

²²⁹ Livingston, “Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention,” 6.

are “at least three understandings of the CNN effect: media as an accelerant to the process, as an inhibitor, and as an agenda setter.”²³⁰ It is important to acknowledge that “the level of interest media have and the potential consequence of that interest vary substantially.”²³¹ However, that potential “consequence” could also mean close to one million Rwandan lives. The failure to understand Rwanda at the beginning of April, the attention to comparisons to Somalia, and the focus on the other ‘profitable’ stories, all altered the way in which the story of the Rwandan genocide was told to the world.

The Coverage

The American television coverage of the Rwanda genocide began on April 6 when NBC, ABC, and CBS each aired clips ten to twenty seconds in length that briefly explained the president's assassination and provided very little, if any, additional information about the situation on the ground. For example, NBC produced a ten second segment at the 22-minute mark of their broadcast on the evening of April 6, 1994.²³² During the ten-second clip, Tom Brokaw explained that the presidents of “Rwanda and Burundi” were killed in a plane crash, and that reports suggested that it was a result of “rocket fire.”²³³ ABC and CBS also

²³⁰ Livingston, “Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention,” 10.

²³¹ Livingston, “Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention,” 10.

²³² “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 6, 1994.

²³³ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 6, 1994.

delivered similar reports about the deaths of the presidents of the “two African nations”²³⁴ in roughly ten second clips.

On the following day, April 7, 1994, the networks initiated their first reports of massacres. *ABC World News*²³⁵ with Peter Jennings described a “bloodbath” occurring in the “chaos overseas,”²³⁶ but the primary focus of these early stories was the evacuation of the approximately two hundred Americans living in Rwanda at the time. On *CBS Evening News*,²³⁷ Connie Chung used similar language during her broadcast, and explained that the “bloodbath is continuing in Central Africa.”²³⁸ (However, contrary to Chung’s suggestion, the country is actually situated in East Africa.) Likewise, on NBC, Tom Brokaw acknowledged that journalists had still not made their way into Rwanda to gather images for the broadcast: “There are no pictures from today, but we are told that there is a bloodbath underway in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.”²³⁹ As I will outline below, the similarity of the networks on April 7 and their use of the word “bloodbath” was an introduction to the way in which the American networks continued their discourse similarities for the rest of the genocide. Also, on April 7, NBC, like the other networks, chose to air stock photographs and video captioned as “File Footage” of military vehicles driving up and down an unidentified road during what the network described as “Africa’s most savage and enduring ethnic feuds.”²⁴⁰ While the networks did not yet have a total death toll for Rwandans

²³⁴ “ABC World News,” (New York: *American Broadcasting Company*,): April 6, 1994.

²³⁵ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 7, 1994.

²³⁶ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 7, 1994.

²³⁷ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 7, 1994.

²³⁸ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 7, 1994.

²³⁹ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 7, 1994.

²⁴⁰ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 7, 1994.

killed on April 7, they did acknowledge the murder of eleven UN Belgian peacekeepers, which NBC described as an “execution.”²⁴¹

On April 8, 1994, ABC’s Diane Sawyer described the events in Rwanda as a “terrifying tribal war” with a “rampage [that] began two days ago.”²⁴² Sawyer’s comments were placed in juxtaposition with the United States State Department suggesting that “250 Americans are trapped” with “thousands of Western civilians” “caught in the chaos.”²⁴³ During the ABC broadcast, Lindsay Hilsum—a BBC reporter at the time—described the massacres as an “ethnic slaughter,” a “long-running bloody power struggle,” and a “bloodbath [that] started Wednesday” when “Rwanda’s army went on a rampage of killing.”²⁴⁴ Hilsum did not highlight the victims’ identities, and like the other networks, she was unable to specify who was doing the killing. Also, on April 8, Tom Brokaw of NBC news explained that, “when it comes to turmoil and bloodshed, nothing compares to Central Africa.”²⁴⁵ NBC’s statement prefaced a discussion on the Westerners and American citizens trapped in Rwanda. For example, NBC explained that “there are 255 American civilians in Rwanda” and fighting spread from around the US Embassy to a school where “as many as 36 Americans live and work.”²⁴⁶ CBS explained that the “horrified foreigners were rescued from the savagery of the ethnic warfare in Rwanda today” as they escaped an “orgy of violence.”²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 7, 1994.

²⁴² “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 8, 1994.

²⁴³ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 8, 1994.

²⁴⁴ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 8, 1994.

²⁴⁵ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 8, 1994.

²⁴⁶ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 8, 1994.

²⁴⁷ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 8, 1994.

On the evening of April 9, 1994, *NBC Nightly News* with Brian Williams presented a two minute and fifty second piece on Rwanda half way through their broadcast—one of the longest pieces on Rwanda by any of the three networks for the entire month of April. One of the most significant moments in this broadcast came at the very end of the segment when Tom Pettit—an NBC journalist broadcasting from in front of The White House—ended by showing file images of UN peacekeeping vehicles driving in an unnamed country and this provocative statement: "Nobody here or there wants another Somalia."²⁴⁸ As I previously suggested, the comparisons to Somalia were very important for the UN's approaches to intervention and the perpetuation of 'African' related myths and stereotypes.

On April 11, *ABC World News* with Peter Jennings began a piece on Rwanda stating that all of the Americans and foreigners who wanted to leave Rwanda had left the "murder and chaos" and escaped the "drunken men hacking their victims with machetes."²⁴⁹ This description was followed by an interview with an unnamed Western foreigner, from an unidentified country, about to be evacuated from Rwanda, who explained: "They are like animals. They are worse than animals. I can't believe it. I can't believe God created people like that."²⁵⁰ ABC also reported on the plight of the gorillas:

Another casualty of the tribal war in Rwanda, may be the worlds last mountain gorillas—the ones written about by the late Diane Fosse and the subject of the movie *Gorillas in the*

²⁴⁸ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 9, 1994.

²⁴⁹ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 11, 1994.

²⁵⁰ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 11, 1994.

Mist. There are 650 gorillas left—half of them are in the mountains of Rwanda. Wildlife project managers who care for them have fled—leaving the gorillas at the mercy of poachers.²⁵¹

During NBC's April 11 report, Tom Brokaw explained that the "carnage" and "tribal fighting" continued in Rwanda for a fifth day, and it had forced the evacuation of hundreds of foreigners and aid workers.²⁵² NBC then went to a clip of Linda Vester—who arrived in Rwanda that day—explaining that "death is everywhere" in Rwanda, with the words "BLOODY STREETS" highlighted at the bottom of the screen.²⁵³ These were the first real time (not file footage) images to come out of Rwanda. They showed dead bodies on the ground in front of houses, captured by a fast-moving vehicle with a camera mounted on the back as it passed by the victims on the street. In front of the cameraman was a garbage truck full of dead bodies, which was followed by Vester explaining that the "carnage is everywhere" and that the city "smells of death." Vester never identified the victims or the perpetrators, but she did suggest that "Government loyalists of the Hutu tribe and rebels of the minority Tutsi tribe seem bent on killing each other at every turn."²⁵⁴ Vester's piece created another ambiguous explanation for the genocide that fed further myth making: she was unaware that the Hutu were specifically targeting the Tutsi. Also, although very brief, NBC and CBS presented footage for the first time on April 11 that was probably the most

²⁵¹ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 11, 1994.

²⁵² "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 11, 1994.

²⁵³ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 11, 1994.

²⁵⁴ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 11, 1994.

significant visual record of massacres in Rwanda; a moment that genocide scholars and documentaries reference as the only killing that was actually caught on camera. The infamous grainy video footage captured by Nick Hughes—which I discuss at length below²⁵⁵—shows a distant image of an individual holding a machete and striking at people on the street where “three women can be seen pleading for their lives” as they were “savagely beaten, then hacked to death by soldiers.”²⁵⁶

On April 12, NBC broadcasted an extremely short, general piece that explained only that unidentified “peacekeepers” would be killed if they stayed in Kigali, and that the crisis was still “ongoing” in Rwanda.²⁵⁷ The next day, on April 13, Tom Brokaw explained that Belgium had decided to pull all of their soldiers out of Rwanda and the Secretary-General of the UN also considered that it might be necessary to pull the rest of the UN force out of Rwanda.²⁵⁸ At the end of the story, NBC also explained that Belgian paratroopers rescued a number of foreign nationals from a medical facility in Rwanda. During the NBC clip, Tom Brokaw explained that Belgian paratroopers outside of Kigali rescued “18 medical workers” and foreigners from a “remote mental health facility,” and left, without explanation, “some 200 other patients behind.”²⁵⁹ All of this was explained over top of powerful images of the patients from the hospital holding their hands up to the camera.²⁶⁰ In fact, the powerful images with the Belgian paratroopers

²⁵⁵ As I outline below, at the time, Nick Hughes always thought that it was two women in the video, but, in fact, it is a man and a woman.

²⁵⁶ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 11, 1994.

²⁵⁷ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 12, 1994.

²⁵⁸ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 13, 1994.

²⁵⁹ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 13, 1994.

²⁶⁰ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 13, 1994.

evacuating the foreigners from the psychiatric hospital are also the subject of an analysis by Amanda Grzyb, who examined the *Globe and Mail's* coverage of the genocide. The image Grzyb analyzes was published on April 14, 1994, in the *Globe* above the caption: "TERRIFYING ESCAPE: Belgian paratroopers lead a frightened woman from a crowd in Kigali yesterday. Rebels and government troops continued to battle in the Rwandan capital."²⁶¹ Surprisingly, unlike the television coverage that explained that the Western medical workers were working at the 'remote mental health facility', the *Globe* incorrectly depicted a completely different narrative—one that suggested that "the Rwandans are a menacing bunch,"²⁶² which aligned with some of the other television news stereotypes. Therefore, on April 13, NBC actually had part of the overall story correct: they were able to correctly identify the psychiatric patients and the situation at the mental health facility.

On April 15, NBC's Linda Vester reported from Rwanda that UN workers felt that the "old tribal war" was going to continue until "no one is left standing," that the "civil war" was "rapidly encroaching on their safe zone" and that peacekeepers were withdrawing to let the Rwandans "fight it out."²⁶³ At the same time, there was an arresting report on April 15 on NBC – the first and only of its kind on any of the networks – with a Rwandan man making an emotional plea directly to a Belgian soldier. The man said, "we are trying to remain calm, but

²⁶¹ Grzyb, "Media Coverage, Activism and Creating Public Will for Intervention in Rwanda and Darfur," 76.

²⁶² Grzyb, "Media Coverage, Activism and Creating Public Will for Intervention in Rwanda and Darfur," 76.

²⁶³ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 15, 1994.

your decision to leave, this is very bad."²⁶⁴ Immediately following that emotional filmed confrontation, Vester explained that the relief workers were "caught in the crossfire" as they attempted to exit the country, and then interviewed a Belgian soldier who was "relieved" to be leaving: "Frankly, the Rwandans are becoming crazy. They are becoming savages."²⁶⁵ Vester followed that clip and finished the piece by saying that all of the troops have now pulled out of Rwanda and "left behind a brutal conflict, with no end in sight."²⁶⁶

After April 15, the American television networks dramatically scaled back their coverage on Rwanda. On April 16, ABC presented a very brief ten second story regarding the Belgian troops returning home from Rwanda. Far from rejoicing, the troops were shown destroying their United Nations berets because, in the words of Renee Poussaint, "they were disgusted...all they could do was stand by and watch as massacres were committed right before their eyes."²⁶⁷ This story was an anomaly, departing from the general tone of Rwanda reportage up to that point. Despite the fact that the story was very short, it suggested that ABC could be shifting its take on Rwanda, a change that was not, in fact, borne out in the subsequent coverage. The next Rwanda story on ABC, aired on April 19 and it resorted to typical descriptions of the "butchery" in Rwanda occurring because of the "civil war."²⁶⁸

On April 21, as Des Forges outlines, "the Security Council withdrew most of the U.N. troops and left only a few hundred peacekeepers to protect civilians

²⁶⁴ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 15, 1994.

²⁶⁵ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 15, 1994,

²⁶⁶ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 15, 1994.

²⁶⁷ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 16, 1994.

²⁶⁸ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 19, 1994.

already directly under the U.N. flag.”²⁶⁹ On April 22, CBS reported that the UN was pulling 400 troops out of Rwanda because they were “giving up on the bloodbath.”²⁷⁰ CBS also mentioned the vote by the UN Security Council on the evening of April 21 to remove almost all of the peacekeepers from Rwanda. ABC, CBS, and NBC provided very little coverage of Rwanda after they reported on the UN withdrawal on April 21; however, on April 25, the words ‘civil war’ and ‘tribal warfare’ were briefly replaced by ‘genocide.’²⁷¹ The first mention of the word genocide happened during an April 25 interview on CBS, when Dr. Rony Zachariah, from Doctors Without Borders, was interviewed by telephone in Burundi. He stated, “ It is probably the biggest genocide that humanity has faced over the past 140 years. And we have had to leave, because even a minimum level of security could not be guaranteed.”²⁷² The other networks were not forthcoming with the genocide label, although they did acknowledge the horrific nature of the mass killing in Rwanda. Peter Jennings of ABC covered a radio broadcast from the pro-Hutu RTLM station in Rwanda requesting troops to increase killing, and then concluded his broadcast by acknowledging that over 100,000 Rwandans had died since April 6 in the “civil war.”²⁷³ Connie Chung, of CBS, prefaced their coverage of “piles of dead victims of the tribal clashes between Hutus and Tutsis” with a warning: “A warning—these pictures are graphic, but they do tell the story.” The warning was followed by the Nick Hughes video (first revealed on April 11) that captured the individual being killed

²⁶⁹ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁷⁰ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 22, 1994.

²⁷¹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 25, 1994.

²⁷² “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 25, 1994,

²⁷³ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 25, 1994.

and an image of very large piles of dead bodies with a pool of blood flowing from the dead laying in the street.²⁷⁴

At the end of April, a new frame emerged on both CBS and ABC in which they prefaced their visual images with similar warnings about graphic content. For example, on April 28, CBS explained that, “in Rwanda, history is being written in blood”—followed by the warning that: “like the month-long Rwandan civil war itself, the pictures in this report are both gruesome and graphic.”²⁷⁵ Likewise, on April 28, ABC presented a similar warning for its viewers: “Now, what you’re about to see, is not easy to look at.”²⁷⁶ Following the warning, ABC’s John McWethy presented a story about the genocide:

The savagery in Rwanda is turning out to be far worse than anyone had imagined...there is also a growing realization that the killing is not just some tribal feud, but rather a *calculated* attempt by factions in Rwanda’s military to *exterminate* both the country’s minority population, and any of the majority Hutu tribe who were willing to share power.²⁷⁷

That moment marked a significant shift in the master narrative, one in which past reportage was potentially corrected and the full extent of the violence in Rwanda was recognized. The discourse was no longer about “civil war,” but about the use and avoidance of the word “genocide” in the international community. For instance, in an additional April 28 report, ABC quoted Christine Shelly, the U.S.

²⁷⁴ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 25, 1994.

²⁷⁵ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 28, 1994.

²⁷⁶ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 28, 1994.

²⁷⁷ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 28, 1994,

State Department spokesperson as saying: "It is far too early to officially call it genocide...the situation is beginning to fit the definition...it appears that much of this is directed towards particular ethnic groups, certainly the types of actions being committed and the extent of the killings also would suggest that this type of activity is taking place."²⁷⁸ ABC balanced the State Department's position with an opposing point of view: "others say evidence of genocide in Rwanda is already in," such as Roger Winter, the US Director for the Committee on Refugees, who explained during an interview that: "[It is] really appropriate to use the word genocide."²⁷⁹ ABC finished the two-minute segment by explaining that, "beyond intensifying diplomacy and sending emergency food, the Clinton administration says there is little the U.S. can do."²⁸⁰

On April 30, 1994, CBS aired its last story on Rwanda for the month of April, and – at a length of three minutes and ten seconds – produced its longest story on Rwanda that month. United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros-Ghali, explained that, "something has to be done" to stop the killing and he wanted an "African contribution"²⁸¹ to the presence in Rwanda. After the interview with Boutros-Ghali, CBS' Giselle Fernandez reported:

While the world reacts to the human suffering in Rwanda by sending aid, the deployment of an extensive force seems unlikely. The US and most Western States seem more than

²⁷⁸ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 28, 1994.

²⁷⁹ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 28, 1994.

²⁸⁰ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 28, 1994.

²⁸¹ "CBS EVENING NEWS," April 30, 1994.

resistant to risk any lives in a country where ethnic warfare is only likely to escalate.²⁸²

At the end of April, the American television news broadcasters started to highlight that the international community was avoiding the use of the word genocide to describe the massacres in Rwanda because they were not willing to “risk any lives.” However, as Des Forges suggests, the word genocide is incredibly powerful, and she believes that “opposition to the genocide would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives,” and “would have required no military force and no expense.”²⁸³ At the end of April, the American television news broadcasters identified the genocide in interviews with individuals who described it as such. However, if the American television media, and more specifically the American government, had “unambiguously called the genocide by its awful name, they would have shattered the masquerade of legitimacy created by the interim government and forced Rwandans to confront the evil they were doing.”²⁸⁴ Recognition of the power of the word genocide was certainly highlighted by the “frequently ignored nonpermanent members of the Security Council,”²⁸⁵ such as Nigeria, the Czech Republic, Spain, Argentina, and New Zealand, who took on the role of trying to enforce a commitment to action. While the West “seem[ed] more than resistant to risk any lives”²⁸⁶ in a “tribal war,” the Czech representative declared the opposite: “Rwanda is not a priority for the Czech government, but as

²⁸² “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 30, 1994.

²⁸³ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁸⁴ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁸⁵ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁸⁶ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 30, 1994.

a human being I cannot sit here and do nothing.”²⁸⁷ Unfortunately, despite occasionally acknowledging the genocide at the end of April, it was not until the end of July when the American television media really “unambiguously called the genocide by its awful name,”²⁸⁸ but, by that point, it really did not force the “Rwandans to confront the evil they were doing,” because the perpetrators were busy mixing in with other Rwandan refugees in Zaire.

Stereotyping the “tribal war”

Throughout April of 1994, ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news broadcasts constructed a ‘nameless’ stereotypical ‘tribal’ ‘African’ as one of the main characters in their coverage of the Rwandan genocide. This trend began with the assassination of President Habyarimana, whom none of the three networks called by name, either immediately after the plane crash or throughout the weeks of intensive coverage that followed. If the president of a Western nation were killed in a plane crash, would the American television news media dare neglect to mention his or her name? Mel McNulty suggests that in the case of Rwanda, Western news consumers were “fed an occasional series of unlinked reports about seemingly unrelated crises, which generally fitted into the typical African mould of biblical catastrophes.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁸⁸ Des Forges, “Leave None To Tell The Story, Genocide in Rwanda.”

²⁸⁹ Mel McNulty, “Media Ethnicization and International Response to War and Genocide in Rwanda,” in *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence*, ed. Tim Allen and Jean Seaton, (London: Zed Books, 1999), 270.

The development of the 'African' myth is accomplished through stereotypical or generalized discourse altered through cultural convention, which eventually creates a mythologized 'meaning'. Like Mel McNulty, Jo Ellen Fair suggests that the Western mainstream media commonly presents 'Africans' as "black," "primitive" and "savage" people who are often classified as the 'Other' to the Western Self.²⁹⁰ Examples of this superficial "duality" were evident when ABC, CBS, and NBC suggested that "Africa's" "savage" "enduring" "ethnic feuds" were creating "chaos" and a full out "bloodbath." That discourse presented a mental image that is traditionally associated with historical postcolonial discourse; the tradition of viewing African conflicts as the exclusive domain of the 'savages' over 'there'. The perpetuation of these stereotypes influenced the enduring colonial myth of race-based difference. When the television news networks presented explicitly racist discourse, it reinvigorated myths that the African Other is somehow less than human. As Stuart Hall suggests, this oppositional logic can be generated by seemingly harmless organizational discourse. He writes:

Racialized discourse is structured by a set of binary oppositions. There is the powerful opposition between 'civilization' (white) and 'savagery' (black). There is the opposition between a biological or bodily characteristics of the 'black' and the 'white' 'races', polarized into their extreme

²⁹⁰ Jo Ellen Fair, "War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa's Media Image," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 5 (1993): 12.

opposites--each the signifiers of an absolute difference
between human 'types' or species.²⁹¹

The continuous use of the racist myth enabled the viewers of the April 1994 network news broadcasts to disassociate themselves quite easily from Rwandan suffering. This sort of dehumanization was particularly evident on April 11, when the anonymous foreigner on ABC described the Rwandans as "worse than animals." This statement was further exacerbated by the subsequent story about the other "casualty of the tribal war in Rwanda:"²⁹² the gorillas. Viewers were faced with a disturbing segue that included footage from the film *Gorillas in the Mist*, creating a juxtaposition between the poor 'helpless' 'wild' and 'savage' gorillas and the Rwandans who are "like animals" or even "worse than animals." One could even argue that this inappropriate juxtaposition placed Rwandans below that of the "world's last mountain gorillas," because they were essentially blaming the "animals"—the Tutsi caretakers of the gorillas running from the Hutu—for making these gorillas a "casualty of the tribal war."²⁹³

The compartmentalization of Rwandans into binaries based on racist signifiers was "typical of US coverage of Africa generally."²⁹⁴ Fair and Parks write:

Journalists relied on stereotypes—thoroughly tested by news organizations in stories set in other African countries, such

²⁹¹ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 238.

²⁹² "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 11, 1994.

²⁹³ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 11, 1994.

²⁹⁴ Fair and Parks, "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees," 36.

as Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan—that characterized the genocide in Rwanda as a result of some inexplicable uncontrollable primordial tribalism that drove Hutus and Tutsis to murder.²⁹⁵

As Fair and Parks suggest, we must examine the language journalists used to describe the events unfolding in Rwanda. For example, on April 7, all three networks established a linguistic template, which subsequent coverage followed. The stage was set, and the discourse did not shift until the word “genocide” was finally introduced into the broadcasts late in the month of April. None of the early network coverage included images, but all three referred to Rwanda as a “bloodbath” with absolute continuity—a continuity that lined up with the stereotypes “thoroughly tested by news organizations in stories set in other African countries.”²⁹⁶

Fair and Parks explain that the “framing of news coverage of the Rwandan genocide as localized Hutu-Tutsi warfare made news reports simpler to produce and easier for U.S. television audiences to digest.”²⁹⁷ Likewise, they suggest, “reporters at the outset were unable to make clear distinctions as to which side was good or bad. This ambiguity caused the genocide story to receive far less coverage than subsequent movements of thousands of refugees into settlement

²⁹⁵ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 36.

²⁹⁶ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 31.

²⁹⁷ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 36.

camps in 1995 and 1996."²⁹⁸ In *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*, Allan Thompson reiterates this point:

Most international news organizations initially misunderstood the nature of the killing in Rwanda, portraying it as the result of tribal warfare, rather than genocide. Much of the international coverage focused on the scramble to evacuate expatriates from the country.²⁹⁹

An example of this misunderstanding was evident on April 8 when Tom Brokaw of NBC framed his report with a sweeping stereotype: "when it comes to turmoil and bloodshed, nothing compares to Central Africa."³⁰⁰ For NBC, "turmoil and bloodshed" was part of the normal Rwandan cosmology.

Despite attempting to make stories coming out of Rwanda "simpler" and more appealing for their television audience by discussing the evacuation of Westerners, Fair and Parks suggest that, overall, "the Rwandan genocide was not a 'good' news story for many US news organizations."³⁰¹ As I suggested in Chapter I, conflicts in Africa are rarely considered 'good' news stories, and the history of 'race' identification and stereotypes—like the ones employed by NBC on April 8—are one of the reasons why. "Race," as Jo Ellen Fair explains, "is a central organizing principle of social relations in the United States, and because media organizations are powerful institutions connected to other powerful

²⁹⁸ Fair and Parks, "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees," 36.

²⁹⁹ Thompson, "Introduction," 2.

³⁰⁰ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 8, 1994.

³⁰¹ Fair and Parks, "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees," 36.

political, social, and economic institutions, notions of race and of 'blackness' will inevitably make their way into news content."³⁰² Fair has examined the use of stereotypical imagery dedicated to "Africa" in American newsrooms, and one place that she can typically turn to in order to understand the unfortunate outcome of networks using embedded, condescending, and stereotypical discourse, is simply by asking her students:

Each semester when I ask my students, the majority of whom are white and middle class, to describe for me their images and ideas of "Africa," "Africans," or particular countries on the African continent, I get the usual litany of stereotypical, negative, and often condescending descriptions. To my students, "Africa" is: "a basketcase," "jungle-covered" "big game, safari," "impoverished," "falling apart," "famine-plagued," "full of war," "AIDS-ridden," "torn by apartheid," "weird," "brutal," "savage," "primitive," "backward," "tribal," "undeveloped," and "black." Moreover, my students describe "Africans" as: "having AIDS," "lazy," "crazy," "corrupt," "troubled," "underdeveloped," "fight[ing] all the time," "brutal," "savage," "exotic," "sexually active," "backward," "tribal," "primitive," and again "black."³⁰³

³⁰² Fair, "War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa's Media Image," 6.

³⁰³ Fair, "War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa's Media Image," 5.

This discourse, which draws a distinct difference between one's self and the Other subject of the binary, can also encourage the creation of "negative feelings," "aggression" and "hostility." Hall writes:

Difference is ambivalent. It can be both positive and negative. It is both necessary for the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self as a sexed subject--and at the same time, it is threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the 'Other'.³⁰⁴

In April 1994, the dissociation that Hall suggests emerges from a "threatening" *Other*, was evident in the ambiguous language that the networks used to describe the genocide: "carnage," "chaos and anarchy,"³⁰⁵ and "tribal fighting" that had "plunged into ethnic slaughter."³⁰⁶ I will argue that this sort of discourse created a false 'idea' of Rwanda, resulting in the West further distancing itself from the small African country—especially when Westerners were affected. Hence the stories juxtaposing 'African aggressors' that 'threatened' the vulnerable westerners, which served as a point of identification and emphasized the violence as a function of racial differences.

Hostility and "negative feelings" were established through a discourse of racialized difference that both invented and reinvented Africa for the West:

³⁰⁴ Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 238

³⁰⁵ "CBS EVENING NEWS," April 9, 1994.

³⁰⁶ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 11, 1994.

...the social and political constructs of “Africa” and “Africans” racially as “black,” along side a host of very unfavorable attributes, I find to be particularly revealing about the way in which “Africa” and “Africans” have been invented historically and reinvented contemporarily. “Fact” and “fiction” constantly reinforce each other in the construction of Africa and Africans as the undifferentiated “Other”.³⁰⁷

Allan Thompson suggests that the fictional “construction” of Africa played a significant role in American media because they were “misconstruing the killing in the first weeks as spontaneous, tribal warfare rather than a systematic campaign to exterminate a minority.”³⁰⁸ Likewise, I feel that the discourse successfully created a further separation between the “Americans” and the “Africans” when, during the first week of the genocide, all of the news networks were focused on evacuation of Western foreigners from the “chaos” in Rwanda. For example, distancing was particularly evident on April 8 when CBS explained that the “horrified foreigners were rescued from the savagery of the ethnic warfare in Rwanda today,” escaping an “orgy of violence.”³⁰⁹ Using of the term “orgy of violence” three times in less than thirty seconds certainly catered to the myth that the “savages” were going to harm the innocent Westerners with random, indiscriminate violence – the precise opposite of a genocide, which is premeditated, organized, and targeted.

³⁰⁷ Fair, “War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa’s Media Image,” 5.

³⁰⁸ Thompson, “Introduction,” 8.

³⁰⁹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 8, 1994.

Amanda Grzyb argues that the Western media uses a racialized discourse to bolster stories about the safety of Westerners. She writes:

The western media's tendency to depict "the African" as a racially inscribed other suggests that African-ness acts as a foil for western subjectivity ("savage" or "tribal" Africa vs. the "civilized" and "civilizing" west). This representational logic creates layers of meaning that can sometimes be quite contradictory. For example, during the Rwandan genocide, Hutu and Tutsi people were often constructed as inhabiting a single, interchangeable racialized identity: "warring" Africans whose violence was fueled by mysterious "ancient tribal hatreds," "savages" who butchered one another indiscriminately and threatened the safety of western expatriates.³¹⁰

The construction of 'difference' by the America television networks outlined a distinct separation between 'us'—the Westerners—and 'them'—the Rwandans—by consistently implementing language that forced the people of Rwanda into a "single, interchangeable racialized identity." The discourse created a false reality driven by racial stereotypes masking the "real," which is precisely what Fair also argues:

In reproducing the dominant or prevailing language and discourses, media organizations position individuals, objects,

³¹⁰ Grzyb, "Media Coverage, Activism and Creating Public Will for Intervention in Rwanda and Darfur," 70.

and relations in a way that naturalizes the boundaries of discussion as the only ones possible or the only ones that are “real.”³¹¹

Following Fair’s argument, the American networks described the genocide as the “ethnic ritual of slaughter and revenge”³¹² in an attempt to, in some way, “naturalize” the situation into something that often occurred. Such “naturalizing” discourse was also reiterated on April 15 on NBC with the emotional plea.³¹³ Despite what possible “reality” the viewer could take away from this exchange, NBC immediately counteracted any thoughts about the man’s deadly dilemma or Western remorse with a clip that instantly placed the focus back on the safety of Westerner expatriates. Juxtaposed with the Rwandan man’s interview, the Belgian soldier was “relieved” to be leaving “behind a brutal conflict, with no end in sight”³¹⁴ because, he said: “Frankly, the Rwandans are becoming crazy. They are becoming savages.”³¹⁵ Like the report that described the Rwandans as “animals,” this report both dehumanized and racialized the victims and perpetrators of the genocide indiscriminately. Not only did the April 15 clip use provocative and racist language to separate the Rwandans from the ‘domesticated’ Westerners, NBC also essentially numbed the viewer’s interest in any sort of intervention. That discourse came full circle when, on April 29, NBC’s

³¹¹ Fair, “War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa’s Media Image,” 13.

³¹² “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 13, 1994.

³¹³ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 15, 1994.

³¹⁴ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 15, 1994.

³¹⁵ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 15, 1994.

last story that month once again described the “crazy” Rwandans “becoming savages.”³¹⁶

April 11 was one of the most significant shifts in the coverage because the networks began to show Nick Hughes’ footage of the killing in the street. The video, which was originally assumed to be “three women...pleading for their lives” as they were “savagely beaten, then hacked to death by soldiers,”³¹⁷ is an iconic image of the genocide. The video was captured by Nick Hughes, a British director/cameraman, from the top floor of a French school on the other side of a valley in central Kigali.³¹⁸ After looking through the scope of a rocket launcher, which Hughes borrowed from one of the Belgian soldiers at the school, he relocated the people with his camera lens, and pressed record. The video footage had a number of jump cuts throughout because Hughes was attempting to conserve what little battery life he had left on his camera, but he was able to capture almost twenty minutes of footage that featured “two women among one pile of bodies” who were “slowly beaten to death, tortured.”³¹⁹ Hughes’ description reads: “Both women were kneeling. One was begging, arms outstretched. Nonchalantly, the killers would come over and beat the men who were dying in front of these women, then stroll away.”³²⁰ Also, throughout the twenty-minute video, Hughes noticed that “no one questioned why these people were there, why they were doing this,” and he later acknowledged, “people living

³¹⁶ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” April 29, 1994.

³¹⁷ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 11, 1994.

³¹⁸ Thompson, “Introduction,” 3.

³¹⁹ Nick Hughes, “Exhibit 467: Genocide Through a Camera Lens,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 233.

³²⁰ Hughes, “Exhibit 467: Genocide Through a Camera Lens,” 232.

on the street could have stopped them. There is no attempt to escape and no possibility of escape.”³²¹ He continues:

Eventually, someone killed the two women with severe blows. I caught that on tape, one of the only instances, I believe, of an actual killing being recorded by the media. Looking back, it is surprising that given the number of bodies we saw around the city when we traveled with military convoys, we hadn’t witnessed the killing of more people. Nobody was going to kill in front of the camera if they knew it was recording. I suppose, in this instance, they didn’t know they were being watched because we were across the valley.³²²

In a 2009 *Toronto Star* article, Allan Thompson³²³ compared the impact of Nick Hughes’ video to the Vietnamese girl, Kim Phuc, running away from the napalm during the Vietnam War, the "Falling Man" of September 11, or the man defying the tanks in Tiananmen Square in 1989. However, despite the comparisons, Thompson feels that Hughes’ video had an important difference:

But the images of the praying man and the woman who perished beside him on a dirt road in Rwanda are somehow different, more urgent, more haunting for what might have been.

³²¹ Hughes, "Exhibit 467: Genocide Through a Camera Lens," 233.

³²² Hughes, "Exhibit 467: Genocide Through a Camera Lens," 233.

³²³ Allan Thompson, "The Father and Daughter We Let Down," *Toronto Star*, April 11, 2009, accessed October 22, 2010, <http://www.thestar.com/article/616860>.

The news footage of their deaths was captured in the first moments of a 100-day rampage, at the front end of the arc of a genocide that would overtake Rwanda in the months to come. If only we had understood what we were seeing – or cared enough to understand – Rwanda might have been different.

As their deaths were broadcast around the world, their unidentified bodies were hurled into the back of a yellow truck and dumped into a mass grave, forgotten by the world that also forgot their country.³²⁴

The lack of context and understanding is precisely the issue that many journalists and photographers face when capturing images of individuals during war, natural disasters, genocide or crimes against humanity. In fact, as one can see in the differing accounts between Nick Hughes and Allan Thompson, some of the information can change. Nick Hughes always thought that it was two women in the video, but, in fact, it was a man and a woman.³²⁵ April 11 was not the last time the images of the machete murder were seen on American television screens, but it certainly helped reinvigorate many of the myths that had come to be associated with Africa up until that point when Linda Vester said—over top of the grainy images—that the tribes seemed "bent on killing each other at every turn."³²⁶ Vester's dialogue over top of the images of Hughes' machete murder is also important to acknowledge, because instead of enabling the video to speak

³²⁴ Thompson, "The Father and Daughter We Let Down"

³²⁵ Thompson, "The Father and Daughter We Let Down."

³²⁶ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," April 11, 1994.

for itself, Vester seemed to change the story. Specifically, her use of the words 'each other' forced the viewer to read the people in the video not as an individual 'victim' or 'perpetrator,' because they were lumped together with 'each other' into one specific 'nameless,' 'faceless,' and 'genderless,' identifier that catered to the typical African myths of "tribal fighting" that are presumed to be inevitable, unpredictable and "at every turn." There was a disconnection between what the American news broadcasters were actually witnessing—a terrorized populace of Tutsi and moderate Hutu being killed—and the narrative that implied an equality between victims and perpetrators.

Presenting images of 'nameless,' 'faceless,' 'genderless,' 'Africans' has become a convention for many in the media industry, and it certainly aids a viewer's disassociation from the 'people' that have become 'objects' on the television screen. In "If I Look at the Mass, I Will Never Act," Paul Slovic argues that viewing images of suffering, genocide and mass murder in large quantities also numb the viewer's ability to really care: "the numbers fail to spark emotion or feeling and thus fail to motivate action. Genocide in Darfur is real, but we do not "feel" that reality."³²⁷ Susan Sontag makes a similar observation when she discusses the role of photography, and the way in which one is not able to consume the "reality" through the visual medium of the photograph. For example, as Sontag explains, "a photograph that brings news of some unsuspected zone of misery cannot make a dent in public opinion unless there is an appropriate

³²⁷ Paul Slovic, "If I Look at the Mass, I will Never Act: Psychic Numbing and Genocide," *Judgment and Decision Making* 2 (2007): 81.

context of feeling and attitude."³²⁸ Aligning further with Slovic in a discussion on affect and photography, Sontag suggests that, "photographs shock in so far as they show something novel...one's first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany."³²⁹ Essentially, the negative epiphany is disempowered because we often focus of the generalized myth that violence, tribal war and brutality is directly associated with 'Africa', and that removes a sense of shock. For instance, like the racist discourse used by the American television networks in April 1994, images also had the ability to alter the truth of an event and make it "less real":

Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more—and more... An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs—think of the Vietnam War.... But after repeated exposure to images an event also becomes less real.³³⁰

The images captured by Nick Hughes failed to build viewer empathy because the video was always shown in conjunction with discourse of race-based stereotypes and other images that conflated other 'African' myths. For example, I found that the American television networks continued to show Hughes' video on a number of occasions—April 11th, 18th and 25th—juxtaposed with the same images of the

³²⁸ Sontag, *On Photography*, 17.

³²⁹ Sontag, *On Photography*, 19.

³³⁰ Sontag, *On Photography*, 20.

same pile of dead bodies in the middle of the street.³³¹ Images can fail to provide the viewer with an "appropriate context of feeling and attitude,"³³² which was certainly the case when CBS prefaced a story with Hughes' video with a warning.³³³ The warnings that CBS and ABC started using on April 25 and 28 as an introduction to the "graphic" images established an ironic twist when the broadcaster explained that they "do tell the story," because in no way did the images really 'tell' the 'true' story. The warnings also created an atmosphere of racialized difference between the Rwandans and Americans on April 28 when CBS explained that, "in Rwanda, history is being written in blood...like the month-long Rwandan civil war itself, the pictures in this report are both gruesome and graphic."³³⁴ These warnings appear, from a distance, to bring a sense of 'reality' to the viewer, but attempting to do so in a myth laden environment, as Sontag and Slovic outlined, is impossible. ABC and CBS may have warned their viewers about the unsettling images, but the emotional charge of these images were disrupted by the racist discourse that had been attached to them for the month prior.

Repetitive presentations of dead bodies laying on the road in large piles, and dialogue that described the genocide as "tribal warfare" catered to the typical 'African' myths and distanced the western viewers from something that was apparently inevitable. That phenomenon also occurred because, trapped within

³³¹ "ABC WORLD NEWS," April 18, 1994.

³³² Sontag, *On Photography*, 22.

³³³ "CBS EVENING NEWS," April 25, 1994.

³³⁴ "CBS EVENING NEWS," April 28, 1994.

the basic structure of semiotics, captive images can only carry with them the meaning that society constructs:

Though an event has come to mean, precisely, something worth photographing, it is still ideology (in the broadest sense) that determines what constitutes an event. There can be no evidence, photographic or otherwise, of an event until the event itself has been named and characterized.³³⁵

As the same video clips and images continued to inundate viewers with the same stereotypes—made possible by the “specialized tourists known as journalists”³³⁶ providing the “living room sights and sounds”³³⁷ —I would argue that Western viewers were forced to try to ‘witness’ something that had been “named and characterized” as a ‘ritual’ ‘tribal slaughter’ and not as a genocide. An image’s ability to keep its “emotional charge” is very important because, as Sontag explains, “the ethical content of photographs is fragile. With the possible exception of photographs of those horrors, like the Nazi camps, but again the status of ethical reference point, most photographs do not keep their emotional charge.”³³⁸

ABC and NBC lost the “emotional charge” in images broadcast on April 13 showing Rwandan mental health patients being left behind as the Belgian paratroopers rescued all of the Westerners. The images are very difficult to look at when one understands the real context of what was happening, but on April

³³⁵ Sontag, *On Photography*, 19.

³³⁶ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2004), 18.

³³⁷ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 18.

³³⁸ Sontag, *On Photography*, 21.

13, 1994, the images were mitigated by a discourse that described these people as 'crazy' 'tribal' 'savages' (not to mention the fact that there already are/were horrific stereotypes in North America pertaining to mental health facilities). The images only developed through the context of how viewers understood the content of the image. Therefore, I would argue that the footage of the 200 patients surrendering to the Western 'rescue team' falls directly within the logic of binary opposition used throughout the month of April to spatially separate the 'crazy' 'tribal' 'savages' from the Westerners.

For the American television broadcasters, the importance of spatially separating the West from 'them' was also revealed in NBC's narration that immediately followed the story about the mental health facility on April 13, 1994: "back in this country." Discourse like "back in this country" can have a tragic effect on the subject because it leaves the "Other" "spatially incarcerated":

In writing Africa in oppositional terms ("here/there," "we/they", "ours/ theirs'), difference becomes spatialized, with the "object" of "our" study or reportage placed "over there." It is at that moment when the object is "spatially incarcerated" as the "Other" that any opportunity for relations based upon dialogue rather than domination ends. Spatially separating countries, cultures, or peoples allows difference to remain unproblematized as merely "us" and "them" (or perhaps even "us" versus "them")."³³⁹

³³⁹ Fair, "War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa's Media Image," 10.

In fact, on numerous occasions—April 13 being one of them—Tom Brokaw used the *Othering* discourse of “back in this country” and “back at home now” to segue into his next story, which certainly separated what was happening in Rwanda and “Central Africa” from ‘us’ in the West.

When is it ‘genocide’?

As Adam Jones explains, “until the second world war, genocide was a “crime with no name.””³⁴⁰ Since Raphael Lemkin implemented the campaign to persuade the United Nations to create a convention on genocide in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the power of the word “genocide” encouraged – some would even say, obligated – international response. After April 15, 1994, all of the American television networks began to scale back the coverage on Rwanda; however, closer to the end of the month, the stories coming from the American broadcasters began to shift. Despite the fact *The New York Times* ran an editorial about the UN withdrawal from Rwanda on April 23 in which it refers to the massacres as “genocide,” or some journalists – like the BBC’s Mark Doyle – and some international NGOs had been describing Rwanda as ‘genocide’ for a good portion of April, it was not until April 25 when the words ‘civil war’ and ‘tribal warfare’ were finally replaced on CBS for a brief moment by the word ‘genocide’.³⁴¹ A similar shift in discourse happened on ABC on April 28, 1994,³⁴² but the most significant part in the April 28 report came with the United States

³⁴⁰ Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 8.

³⁴¹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” April 25, 1994.

³⁴² “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 28, 1994.

State Department's desperate avoidance of the word "genocide" because they knew the term had to signal an obligation to intervene.³⁴³ The sense of "confusion" and "chaos" about whether or not there was an actual genocide occurring in Rwanda was certainly plastered all over the screens during the press conference. In fact, the "confusion" was presented once again as ABC followed up the State Department interview with Roger Winter, the then US Director for the Committee on Refugees, who explained that it was "really appropriate to use the word genocide." CBS also reiterated the need for intervention on April 30, 1994—the last clip of April from American television news;³⁴⁴ however, they also acknowledged that those 'words' and 'images' on the screen were not encouraging very much motivation for humanitarian intervention because the U.S. was "more than resistant to risk any lives in a country where ethnic warfare is only likely to escalate."³⁴⁵

Today, there are still lingering questions about why the media or international politicians waited so long to declare that what happened in Rwanda was a genocide when there was a vast amount of evidence to show that Hutu extremists were, indeed, committing genocide against Tutsi civilians. As Linda Melvern explains, "there were ample grounds to prove that the genocide convention had been violated between 6 April and 15 July," but the UN patiently took the action of creating a committee of experts to "evaluate the evidence."³⁴⁶ The evidence from the UN committee of experts was not officially available until

³⁴³ Fair and Parks, "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees," 32.

³⁴⁴ "CBS EVENING NEWS," April 30, 1994.

³⁴⁵ "CBS EVENING NEWS," April 30, 1994.

³⁴⁶ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 227.

October of 1994—three and a half months after the genocide had finished. At that point, they concluded that, "although both sides of the armed conflict had perpetrated serious breaches of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity, there existed a mass of evidence that the extermination of the Tutsi and moderate Hutus had been planned months in advance."³⁴⁷ In April 1994, the Clinton administration avoided using the term associated with Rwanda on every possible occasion because it provided "some cover against critics of the US government's nonintervention."³⁴⁸ It was not until 1998 that Bill Clinton finally used the word genocide, and it was a rhetorical reversal that was an important step to admitting the failure of the international community: "We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide."³⁴⁹ Not only was the 1998 reversal an important reminder for the unwillingness of many Western governments to intervene in Rwanda, it was also a reminder for those in the media industry that words can be extremely powerful.

Conclusion

From April 6, 1994, to April 30, 1994, American television news broadcasters presented viewers with stories about the Rwandan genocide driven by stereotypical racist discourse, inappropriate comparisons to Somalia and a general misunderstanding of what was actually happening to the people of Rwanda. ABC, CBS, and NBC failed to identify the massacres in Rwanda as

³⁴⁷ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, 227.

³⁴⁸ Fair and Parks, "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees," 32.

³⁴⁹ Fair and Parks, "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees," 32.

genocide, and consistently misrepresented what was happening to the Tutsi and the moderate Hutu. In addition, for an entire month, Rwanda was the least reported continuing international issue to reach viewers in the West, which is difficult to fathom for many genocide scholars because they consistently argue that the "media content can indeed have an effect on policy."³⁵⁰ As I will present in the Chapter III, the same stereotypical discourse and conventions television news used to produce stories in 'Africa' continued throughout the summer of 1994; however, the coverage concluded with a television news frenzy about the 'good news' story of a humanitarian crisis, and ends with an epiphany that acknowledges their failure.

³⁵⁰ Livingston, "Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda," 196.

CHAPTER THREE

May 1, 1994 – July 18, 1994

In this chapter, I examine American television news coverage of the Rwandan genocide between May 1 and July 18 1994. Like the network coverage during the month of April, Richard Dowden suggests that subsequent television reports about the genocide also “reinforced the impression that what was going on there was an inevitable and primitive process that had no rational explanation and could not be stopped by negotiation or force.”³⁵¹ From May until the end of July, ABC, CBS and NBC continued to provide inaccurate coverage of the massacres, while they were also engaged by the emerging story of a Rwandan refugee crisis. In May, the hundreds of thousands of refugees that fled the country established a distracting narrative thread that described the movement of refugees from Rwanda to countries like Zaire, Uganda and Tanzania. As they reported from the refugee receiving states, not Rwanda, these stories garnered far more attention from the networks than the confused stories of civilian massacres. As Livingston suggests, the American television broadcast networks “devoted relatively little attention to the systematic extermination” of the Tutsi, because, instead, they were “centered on the hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees”³⁵² leaving the country and creating a new humanitarian crisis. However, the movement of the refugees into the camps in Zaire was not the only

³⁵¹ Richard Dowden, “Comment: The Rwandan Genocide: How The Press Missed The Story. A Memoir,” *African Affairs* 103 (2004): 284.

³⁵² Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 194.

distraction for the American networks, because they were also infatuated with the O.J. Simpson trial.³⁵³

However, mixed in with the confusion of the refugee crisis, and the attention paid to O.J., was an increasingly dehumanizing discourse (and accompanying images) that suggested that those Rwandans still in the country, and the mass exodus of people were still a ‘natural,’ inevitable occurrence. This inaccuracy surfaced because, as Fair suggests, “following refugees was easier than reporting about mass murder” and “refugees made good visuals because they evoked the now familiar images of famine and conflict in Africa.”³⁵⁴

Information about the refugee crisis was more accessible because journalists could rely on aid agencies to help them tell the story. The news about the refugees was not, however, without confusion. Fair suggests that stories broadcast on ABC, CBS and NBC, “were unable to make clear distinctions as to which side was good or bad”³⁵⁵—the ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’—from the beginning. Near the end of the genocide, as I demonstrate below, the news agencies did eventually understand the nuances of the identities of the fleeing Rwandan refugees, and began to suggest that some Hutu refugees were afraid that the RPF would seek revenge for the genocide. Fair claims that the misinformation and ambiguities “caused the genocide story to receive far less

³⁵³ Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the Media and Government Failed Rwanda,” 194.

³⁵⁴ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 36.

³⁵⁵ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 36.

coverage than subsequent movements of thousands of refugees into settlement camps.”³⁵⁶

From May 1 to July 18, the American television news broadcasters presented “tribal” stereotypes and perpetuated the myth that the genocide was civil war; however, they were also drawn to the emerging story about the fleeing refugees. The refugee coverage often included stereotypes associated with the typical “African humanitarian crisis” and obscured the ways in which the refugee crisis was directly tied to the massacres. It was not until the end of July when some network journalists on the ground began to break down the myths and inaccuracies and changed the discourse. But by then, that was simply too little, too late.

The Coverage

On May 1 and 2, ABC³⁵⁷, CBS and NBC maintained the status quo from the month of April, describing Rwanda as an “orgy of violence”, “civil war”, “bloodbath”³⁵⁸, “savage civil war”, “orgy of murder” “cataclysmic explosion of ethnic cleansing”, “ethnic slaughter and hatred”³⁵⁹ and a “murderous civil war in Rwanda.”³⁶⁰ On May 5, NBC ended their broadcast with another report about the fate of the mountain gorillas in Rwanda. Like the ABC story on April 13, NBC, on May 5, mentioned Diane Fosse and *Gorillas in the Mist*, and reported that “so far

³⁵⁶ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 36.

³⁵⁷ On May 1, ABC did suggest—albeit briefly—that what was happening in Rwanda was a “genocide,” but they continued to use the stereotypical discourse in the same broadcast.

³⁵⁸ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” May 1, 1994.

³⁵⁹ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” May 2, 1994.

³⁶⁰ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” May 2, 1994.

there have been no reports of any gorillas hurt, but many of the scientists and researchers who watch over the animals have had to escape for their own personal safety.”³⁶¹ They also reported that news of the cease-fire had not reached the troops in “the killing fields”³⁶² in Rwanda.

One of the first examples of a ‘genocide’ epiphany was presented by Ron Allen of ABC on May 7 when he explained that there was more evidence that the “civil war” was in fact a “premeditated political act not a spontaneous ethnic hatred”³⁶³ taken on by Rwanda's government, extremist Hutus, looking for more power. Allen also explained that human rights investigators “see a pattern.”³⁶⁴ On the same day that Allen suggested that the genocide was not a “civil war” or “spontaneous ethnic hatred,” NBC and CBS still reported that a “civil war”³⁶⁵ continued in Rwanda. However, days later, on May 9, CBS and Connie Chung explained that the “bloodbath” in Rwanda was approaching a “climax” that evening, but likely not a “conclusion.” Rwanda was leaving behind a “legacy of genocide” which was the worst, Chung explained, since the killing fields in Cambodia. While it appeared that CBS was finally making a significant transition from describing the massacres as civil war to describing them as genocide, on May 13, they reverted to the standard description of a “nightmarish bloodbath in Rwanda.” The following day, ABC suggested that “at least half 1 million people have been killed during Rwanda's 5 weeks of civil war.” Likewise, on May 16, Tom Brokaw explained that the US was “flying in a hundred tons of relief going

³⁶¹ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” May 5, 1994.

³⁶² “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” May 5, 1994.

³⁶³ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” May 7, 1994.

³⁶⁴ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” May 7, 1994.

³⁶⁵ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” and “CBS EVENING NEWS,” May 7, 1994.

into Rwanda almost daily,” and then segued into the next story with “a couple of notes on people now”—to discuss a court case somewhere in America. The juxtaposition of such a significant statement is certainly telling, especially in May. A month after the genocide began, the mass murder of an enormous group of targeted ‘people’ was still not considered to be part of “a couple of notes on people,” which is almost unbelievable.

On June 17, 1994, American television broadcasters devoted almost all of their attention to O.J. Simpson, and experienced a form of ‘genocide amnesia’ as Simpson’s white Ford Bronco attempted to elude police. The very next day, on June 18, the French initiated Operation Turquoise, which was a heavily criticized mission because of the role that the French once had in the training of the presidential guards and supplying the Interahamwe with weapons.³⁶⁶ However, because of the continued media infatuation with O.J. Simpson, the revelation that there was genocide, not civil war, in Rwanda and that the French were sending in troops to confront it, did not reappear on the US evening news until June 23, when CBS reported that French troops were in Rwanda “trying to intervene in a war of genocide.”³⁶⁷ They followed with two interviews that questioned France’s role in the possible genocide. The first interview was with Roger Winter, from the US Committee for Refugees, who outlined why there is a mistrust of the French: “The role of the French in Rwanda has not been a positive one for the last 3 1/2 years. They have basically supported the people who committed the genocide

³⁶⁶ Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, 212

³⁶⁷ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” June 23, 1994.

politically, militarily, and diplomatically.”³⁶⁸ Similarly, Mike Dottridge, from Amnesty International, suggested, “if the French Army was involved in any way in facilitating that dirty war, which eventually became the massacres of genocide that we’ve seen in the last 2 1/2 months, that is very serious.”³⁶⁹ Unfortunately, instead of providing some historical context to both of the interviews, Connie Chung followed that story with an unscientific “CBS news poll” asking if Rwanda was “important to the interests” of the United States and the responsibility of the US to intervene in the genocide. Chung stated:

According to a CBS news poll, most Americans feel that United States has no responsibility to stop the killing in Rwanda. Asked specifically if the US should send ground troops, 61% said no. Only 15% said that what happens in Rwanda is very important to the interests of the United States. By contrast, 59% said that what happens in North Korea is very important to US interests.³⁷⁰

Chung immediately followed that segment with a story on North Korean and American talks, which reinforced the findings of the poll.³⁷¹ The fact that on the very next day, June 24, CBS suggested that the French had moved into Rwanda to protect civilians from “tribal slaughter”³⁷² potentially reveals that CBS had very little interest in acknowledging the reality of the genocide, and a recurring case of

³⁶⁸ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” June 23, 1994.

³⁶⁹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” June 23, 1994.

³⁷⁰ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” June 24, 1994.

³⁷¹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” June 24, 1994.

³⁷² “CBS EVENING NEWS,” June 24, 1994.

'genocide amnesia' helped CBS ignore the same "massacres of genocide"³⁷³ that they had openly acknowledged the day before.

On June 26, NBC covered Rwanda with a story about the African Conference in Washington, which was focusing on "how America [could] lift pessimism into constructive plans for Rwandans and all of Africa."³⁷⁴ In an interview, US National Security Adviser, Tony Lake, suggested, "Rwanda should galvanize American concern for Africa" because it is "a story of ethnic hatred transformed into genocide."³⁷⁵ NBC's acknowledgment of genocide on June 26 was followed with the suggestion that South Africa and its free election was "the only major success story on the continent."³⁷⁶

On July 4, NBC explained that, after three months of "civil war,"³⁷⁷ "the rebels" in the "killing field" captured Kigali.³⁷⁸ Likewise, CBS said that the "civil war"³⁷⁹ was "taking another turn tonight" as the "rebel forces" had the "most significant gain yet"³⁸⁰ by capturing Kigali. However, unlike NBC and CBS, on July 4, ABC ran a report that acknowledged the genocide in Catherine Crier's informed story about a group of Tutsi children. Crier suggested, "these Tutsi children have survived Rwanda's genocide, but their scars are indelible, crippling and deep"³⁸¹ and "everywhere there are stories of horrific ordeals." The report included rather graphic (perhaps even voyeuristic) images of children with

³⁷³ "CBS EVENING NEWS," June 23, 1994.

³⁷⁴ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," June 26, 1994.

³⁷⁵ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," June 26, 1994.

³⁷⁶ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," June 26, 1994.

³⁷⁷ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," July 4, 1994.

³⁷⁸ "NBC NIGHTLY NEWS," July 4, 1994.

³⁷⁹ "CBS EVENING NEWS," July 4, 1994.

³⁸⁰ "CBS EVENING NEWS," July 4, 1994.

³⁸¹ "ABC WORLD NEWS," July 4, 1994.

missing legs and Crier finishing her story by explaining that the camp they just showed in Nyanza is no longer safe and “everyone must leave.”³⁸²

On July 14, CBS explained, “Following the bloodbath of civil war, now comes a tide of human misery,” referencing “Rwanda’s greatest and final wave of refugees.”³⁸³ Remarkably, just four days before the genocide ended, CBS was still reverting to the language of “bloodbath” and “civil war” to describe the genocide. Immediately following this report, CBS interviewed Geoffrey Dennis from the British Red Cross, who rightly acknowledged the reality of how the media could potentially have a positive impact on such a massive crisis: “The danger is, as it happened in Somalia, once this moves away from the headlines, there won’t be money coming in.”³⁸⁴ Setting a precedent for the other media institutions, CBS acknowledged and made public the potential role of the media—something that was never acknowledged at any other time during the course of the genocide. Remarkably, on that very same day, they used the same misleading, inaccurate, stereotypical language that had plagued the genocide from the beginning.

On July 15, just three days before the genocide was over, ABC finally provided nuance about the refugee crisis, acknowledging that the refugees leaving Rwanda were “Hutus fleeing the Tutsi rebel army.”³⁸⁵ It was the first time any of the three networks had made such a distinction. Likewise, on the same day, CBS discussed the United States decision to break diplomatic relations with

³⁸² “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 4, 1994.

³⁸³ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 14, 1994.

³⁸⁴ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 15, 1994.

³⁸⁵ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 15, 1994.

Rwanda because “President Clinton accused the Hutu government there of supporting the massacre of minority Tutsis.”³⁸⁶

On July 16, 1994, ABC reported that Brian Atwood, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, would assess the “relief efforts for the victims of Rwanda's bloody civil war.” While the report did call the genocide a “civil war,” it also made an important distinction about victims and perpetrators. As part of the piece, Ron Allen included an interview with a Rwandan refugee, who said he was running from the country because he heard on a radio broadcast that “Hutus like him were being exterminated by the advancing Tutsi rebel army.”³⁸⁷ Allen followed the interview by clarifying: “there is no evidence of civilian killings by the rebels, but the people believe that the propaganda is true.”³⁸⁸ Then Allen went on to explain that the government soldiers who “did carry out the massacres” also led the refugee march into the Zaire. Allen’s tone and understanding of the context during the July 16 story was significant because he appropriately identified the victims and the perpetrators of the genocide.

On the same day that ABC was the first network to clearly identify the victims and perpetrators of the massacres, CBS ran a similarly groundbreaking story that described the weapons used by the perpetrators. After referring to “Rwanda’s civil war,”³⁸⁹ CBS described the “instruments of genocide,”³⁹⁰ accompanied by images of a large pile of machetes and Jeremy Thompson from

³⁸⁶ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 15, 1994.

³⁸⁷ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 16, 1994.

³⁸⁸ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 16, 1994.

³⁸⁹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 16, 1994.

³⁹⁰ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 16, 1994.

Sky News showing groups of Hutu soldiers, whom he called “the one-time butchers of Rwanda in a bloodstained retreat.” Again, there was finally an emphasis on the identity of the perpetrators, and an acknowledgment that the massacres were one-sided, state-sponsored, and genocidal. On July 16, CBS also ran a very significant dialogue between Mark Phillips and Bob Schieffer in which Phillips stressed that it is important “to remember the context in which this happened.”³⁹¹

Bob Schieffer: Do you think that there is any way that this could have been avoided?

Mark Phillips: In hindsight, it's difficult to say, but clearly at the time there was nothing that any outside government could have, or perhaps would have, more to the point, have done to rectify the situation. You have to remember the context in which this happened. This is a small country far away that not many people have heard of with an almost indefatigable internal crisis. Also, for the Rwandese, it had a very unlucky happenstance of coming right after the international experience in Somalia, and for that matter, the experience in Bosnia. Both situations where international efforts were not used to great effect, so bad luck for them. It's really tough to say in hindsight what could have done, what could have changed things.

³⁹¹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 16, 1994.

Schieffer: Seeing these extraordinary pictures tonight, which is so overwhelming, it is easy to forget that this is only a part of it, because before this exodus happened, at least 200,000 perhaps a half-million people were killed in this fighting. I think another unusual thing, Mark, it is very difficult in this to figure out who the good guys and the bad guys are. Is there a way to separate that out?

Phillips: Well, no. It's also important to look at this back beyond the 2 or 3 months of this particular chapter in this conflict has been underway with these pictures that we have been seeing on TV. This is a conflict that goes back decades and even centuries. This is rooted deep in ethnic animosity and deep social conflicts between haves and have-nots in that part of Africa. The people now in the RPF that are moving with such efficiency through the country and forcing this evacuation ahead of them...are the sons and daughters of people who themselves were forced to flee Rwanda during an earlier Hutu uprising a couple of decades ago. This is a big wheel of misfortune that just keeps on turning and turning and you have to look at it in that context.

Shieffer: The question of course is whether this is too little and too late and that we're going to have to see over the next weeks.

Phillips' consistent reiteration that it was imperative for one "to look at it in that context," presented CBS with a new opportunity to frame the genocide in Rwanda as a real genocide instead of the "civil war" they alluded to at the very beginning of the broadcast on July 16.

On July 18, CBS announced that "the antigovernment forces declared victory," and the conflict in Rwanda was over. Mark Phillips also interviewed Alison Des Forges, from Human Rights Watch, who outlined the "fatalistic" problems on the television screen of an institution run by the "people on the outside" who believe "that the kind of feeling that is going on now has always gone on":

People on the outside have a very fatalistic approach to conflict in Africa. They tend to believe that there has been no change on the African continent and that the kind of killing that is going on now has always gone on and will always go on, so why bother?³⁹²

As Phillips deconstructed stereotypes about the "African continent" and the things that apparently "always go on" there, he highlighted the stance that the Western governments took when it came to Rwanda, which was driven by the stereotypes associated with Africa and Somalia. He said, "the cynical fact is that the Rwandese picked the wrong time to start killing each other again—a time when Western governments, after the experience in Somalia and Bosnia, had grown tired of trying to solve other people's problems, especially in places where

³⁹² "CBS EVENING NEWS," July 18, 1994.

they had no economic or strategic interests.”³⁹³ Like the “economic or strategic interests” that the Western governments acknowledged in the response to the genocide, CBS should have been well aware that the same “interests” were more than likely noted when the media institutions’ executives were deciding which stories would benefit them “economically” or “strategically.” This position was also reiterated during a subsequent interview with Roger Winter from the U.S. Committee for Refugees, who explained that Rwanda is: “a poor country, it's unimportant to most of the world. There's no economic interests there, there's no political interest there, there's no oil, there's no money to be made.” Phillips concluded the story with a hypothetical situation that ‘hits home’ for the Western viewers: “If the Rwandese were fleeing to Florida instead of Zaire, the reaction might be different. But this horror, however terrible, is in a little place few had ever heard of and far away.”³⁹⁴ Phillips’ report marks the first time that any of the American television networks explicitly dealt with the politics of humanitarian intervention suggesting that people in a remote part of Africa were not considered valuable to the United States and the international community.

Phillips’ report on CBS also attempted to give the Rwanda story some retrospective context, especially after the lead anchor, Paula Zahn, claimed that the “the slaughter in Rwanda is only the latest chapter in an age-old tribal conflict” and that there was “a power struggle between the minority Tutsis, who ruled the land for centuries, and the majority Hutus. As correspondent Mark

³⁹³ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

³⁹⁴ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

Phillips reports, the latest chapter has been the bloodiest of all.”³⁹⁵ Philips then continued suggesting more of the appropriate and accurate information:

When the scenes of horror from Rwanda began to literally pile up on the world’s TV screens, the reaction was one of shock and surprise. It shouldn’t have been. The outside world may not have directly caused the Rwanda catastrophe, but it did contribute to it, and it certainly had evidence that it was coming. International relief agencies have been warning for years about the training of political and ethnic murder squads and the people who wrote those reports have their theories on why no one cared.³⁹⁶

This point was also highlighted on ABC, on July 18, shortly after Peter Jennings said: “We begin tonight with Rwanda. Can it get any worse? Yes it can.”³⁹⁷

Uncharacteristically, ABC started their evening broadcast with a story explaining that the Rwandan “antigovernment forces declared victory today” but that a “human catastrophe is now imminent.”³⁹⁸ The story included a claim by the reporter, John McWethy, who – like CBS – suggested that the American government was not interested in intervention: “When the idea of sending US medical teams or water specialists to Rwanda is raised, the Clinton administration says no. The White House wants no repeat of the disaster in Somalia, so the US will fly supplies to the region, but get no more deeply

³⁹⁵ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

³⁹⁶ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

³⁹⁷ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

³⁹⁸ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

involved.”³⁹⁹ While Somalia had been referenced since April 6, on the last day of the genocide, ABC included commentary by Roger Winter, who stressed that the genocide in Rwanda was definitely not “yet another African bloodletting.”⁴⁰⁰ He said, “this situation cannot be allowed to be viewed as yet another African bloodletting, but it was genocide in perhaps the purest construct of genocide that we’ve had since the Holocaust.”⁴⁰¹ Roger Winter’s comparison between Rwanda and The Holocaust was a pivotal moment because, only a few days prior, the genocide was still consistently referenced as ‘tribal warfare’. On July 18, the American television news broadcasters realized that, what was consistently referenced as some type of chaotic random killing, was actually an unimaginable genocide comparable to the Holocaust and they had been ignoring it.

The ‘natural’ stereotypes, and the ‘good’ news story

BBC journalist, George Alagiah, suggests that stereotypes contribute to “the way that African stories are so frequently framed.”⁴⁰² American television broadcasters exposed Rwanda as a product of tribal warfare and were often unaware of the basic history or politics. Likewise, ambiguities and inaccuracies also affected the way in which the refugees were viewed by the American broadcasters between May and July, and the refugee story often distracted the networks from the genocide. US television news broadcasts from African nations have often been, as Suzanne Franks suggests, “reduced to a series of

³⁹⁹ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

⁴⁰⁰ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

⁴⁰¹ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

⁴⁰² Suzanne Franks, “The Neglect of Africa and the Power of Aid,” *The International Communication Gazette* 1 (2010): 75.

journalistic stereotypes.”⁴⁰³ Additionally, Franks outlines that African stories are viewed as “a location for inexplicable ethnic wars and assorted disasters or celebrity visits”⁴⁰⁴ and follow a typical template. As I encountered in my research, the American networks stuck to a typical ‘grim template’ and described the swarms of people fleeing Rwanda as tragic and ‘helpless’ ‘victims’, while failing to recognize the complexity of the genocide still underway during the exodus. As the RPF began to close in on government militia and the perpetrators of the genocide, the Hutu fled the country because they feared that the RPF would revenge the genocide of the Tutsi. My research shows that the American television broadcasters were often oblivious to the origins of the refugees, and unaware that some were genocide perpetrators and members of the Interahamwe militia. Instead, the television broadcasters simply placed them within the stereotypical template as the ‘victims’ of the ‘civil war’. As Franks suggests, misunderstanding the background and presenting misleading reports was yet another tragic flaw:

The ignorance of what had happened in Rwanda was compounded weeks later when the Interahamwe Hutu killers arrived in the camps in eastern Zaire. By then the elections were over in South Africa so there was an unseemly rush by both journalists and aid agencies to places like Goma to tell terrible tales about poor refugees and their suffering. For days there were misleading reports where many of the journalists, who knew

⁴⁰³ Franks, “The Neglect of Africa and the Power of Aid,” 75.

⁴⁰⁴ Franks, “The Neglect of Africa and the Power of Aid,” 75.

little about the background, missed the point that the camps were not ministering to fleeing victims of the slaughter, but full of the recent killers and their relatives.⁴⁰⁵

As the Hutu fled Rwanda because of fears that the RPF would retaliate, news media broadcasters consistently presented misleading reports. It was not until July 15 – three days before the genocide ended – when ABC first acknowledged that many of the refugees leaving Rwanda were “Hutus fleeing the Tutsi rebel army.”⁴⁰⁶

Inaccurate reports from the first days of the genocide to the origins of the refugee crisis show that the networks had “no coherent explanation of events happening in and around Rwanda.”⁴⁰⁷ The lack of a “coherent explanation” meant that the west ignored Rwandan civilian suffering, and the news media kept the US public “distant and safe.” As Niranian Karnik suggests, if news organizations presented accurate and reliable information, the public could take “the relevant information” and, in turn, “affect governments, institutions, locales, and other people.”⁴⁰⁸ Instead, the U.S. public was “kept distant and safe from any actual conflict, and from the complications of explanation.”⁴⁰⁹ The constant misinformation about the genocide and the refugees made the typical network news viewer “an unwitting participant in the production of knowledge about who

⁴⁰⁵ Franks, “The Neglect of Africa and the Power of Aid,” 73.

⁴⁰⁶ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 15, 1994.

⁴⁰⁷ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 37.

⁴⁰⁸ Niranian Karnik, “Rwanda & the Media: Imagery, War & Refuge,” *Review of African Political Economy* 78 (1998): 611.

⁴⁰⁹ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 37.

should live or die in lands far off from the United States.”⁴¹⁰ If the viewers were never aware of the reality behind the Hutu refugees leaving Rwanda on their television screens, they were completely unable to understand the context, which also left them unable to provoke change. Essentially, the American television broadcasters failed to effectively provide their viewers with the truth to fuel their apathy, and, as Philips rightly suggested on July 18, “if the Rwandese were fleeing to Florida instead of Zaire, the reaction might be different. But this horror, however terrible, is in a little place few had ever heard of and far away.”⁴¹¹

However, as Karnik suggests, it can be difficult to be critical of coverage of crises on the magnitude of the Rwandan genocide because “many defenders of the media may claim (perhaps somewhat correctly) that it is a small miracle and a testament to the reporters of the various news agencies who place themselves in these difficult circumstances that enable people around the world to witness first-hand the violence and horror that exists in our modern world.”⁴¹²

Nevertheless, it is still important for the television broadcasters to understand that “difficult circumstances” and “safety” do not condone the production of stereotypes or conditions that mask truth, particularly when it comes to genocide and crimes against humanity. The first week of May repeated the stereotypical language of the April coverage, implying, as Wall suggests, “that the violence

⁴¹⁰ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 37.

⁴¹¹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

⁴¹² Karnik, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 614.

was caused by something innate within the Rwandan people who are likely to burst into savage slaughter at any time.”⁴¹³ She writes:

Instead of supplying readers with full, explanatory portraits of Africa, news organizations have tended to stick with the easy stereotype, the image that can be easily absorbed by readers, however false it may be. The coverage of the Rwanda crisis proved no exception to the negative, shallow coverage of the past.⁴¹⁴

On May 16, the “shallow coverage” that Wall describes was evident when Tom Brokaw segued out of a story on Rwanda to “a couple of notes on people now.”⁴¹⁵ Such distinctive divisions that the television broadcasters highlighted between “us”—the Americans—and “them”—the Rwandans, was present, even in small ways, throughout most of the broadcasts. On May 16, Brokaw and NBC juxtaposed the image of “people” beside the “Rwandans” and successfully maintained the stereotypes of difference, which they also exposed on May 5 by drawing a comparison between the Rwandans and gorillas.

In some ways, Brokaw’s suggestion that the Rwandans were not necessarily “people” was not something new, but par for the course. In April, the media compared Rwandans to the “gorillas in the mist”⁴¹⁶ and interviewed soldiers who described them—the Rwandans—as “worse than animals,”⁴¹⁷ and

⁴¹³ Melissa Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” *International Communication Gazette* 59 (1997): 126.

⁴¹⁴ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 132.

⁴¹⁵ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” May 16, 1994.

⁴¹⁶ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 11, 1994.

⁴¹⁷ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” April 11, 1994.

the coverage between May and July produced similar accounts. When, on May 5, NBC ended their broadcast with another report about the plight of the mountain gorillas, the juxtaposition placed the importance of the gorillas, which had not been reported to be hurt, above the hundreds of thousands of Rwandans who had been killed by that point.

In fact, Karnik suggests that even prior to 1994, the American media introduced the “default” Rwanda gorilla story. In 1992, during the civil war, the first casualty to come out of Rwanda was not a human being; it was a silverback gorilla named Mrithi. Like the April 11 and May 5 stories, the 1992 story created a type of “pop-psychology journalism,” which occurs when “the miniscule is made large and the significant made small.”⁴¹⁸ With this example, Karnik does acknowledge that it is important not to “minimize the fact that a great animal and endangered species was killed needlessly.”⁴¹⁹ However, when the “miniscule” story eclipses the ‘significant,’ journalists have committed a basic injustice. The gorilla comparisons on ABC on April 11 and NBC on May 5, demonstrate how “the story obscures many others.”⁴²⁰

In addition to the gorilla references, I found dehumanizing language comparing fleeing refugees to animals during the mass exodus into Zaire. For example, the refugees were described as “a mad stampede” of refugees or as a “human swarm,”⁴²¹ which essentially suggested, in Wall’s words, “they are not

⁴¹⁸ Karnik, “Rwanda & the Media: Imagery, War & Refuge,” 613.

⁴¹⁹ Karnik, “Rwanda & the Media: Imagery, War & Refuge,” 613

⁴²⁰ Karnik, “Rwanda & the Media: Imagery, War & Refuge,” 613.

⁴²¹ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 128.

rational, fully evolved human beings, but something less.”⁴²² Ultimately, the practice of using animal metaphors to describe Rwandans “dehumanizes the refugees, and can make it difficult for American media consumers to summon much sympathy.”⁴²³ A lack of sympathy was clearly evident during CBS’ June 24 poll, when, CBS suggested, “most Americans feel that United States has no responsibility to stop the killing in Rwanda,” but “what happens in North Korea is very important to the US interests.”⁴²⁴ The repetitive nature of the stereotypes and misinformation coming from the American media—including such unscientific polls—simply continued to highlight the ignorance and apathy.

Another form of dehumanization through comparisons to “animals” or the “natural” environment was exposed when the American television broadcasters covered the refugees’ departure from Rwanda. Such representations, as Wall acknowledges, fit within a “framework that consistently presented them as either pathetic and helpless victims, or as insensate, animal-like creatures, or as barbaric savages.”⁴²⁵ In the same way that the discourse at the beginning of April followed the western stereotypes “that conflates them with the “dark continent,” a place of ongoing “tribal warfare,””⁴²⁶ language associated with the “waves”⁴²⁷ of refugees from May until July not only further dehumanized the Rwandans into a “natural” “inevitable” event, it also added to the general misinformation and “did

⁴²² Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 128.

⁴²³ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 128.

⁴²⁴ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” June 24, 1994.

⁴²⁵ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 127.

⁴²⁶ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 40.

⁴²⁷ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 40.

little to help”⁴²⁸ encourage interest from the international community. Suggesting that the refugee movement was a “natural occurrence” communicated that the “movements of people—like floods or other natural events—cannot be stopped by human intervention.”⁴²⁹ Likewise, the negative outcome of using the “natural” metaphors to describe the refugee situation simply suggested that it was a “natural occurrences in this region of the world.” Wall writes:

Another means of dehumanizing the Rwandans is to describe the movement of great numbers of people so as to suggest that they are natural occurrences in this region of the world. This naturalness is particularly suggested by metaphors which compare the refugees exodus to movements of water.⁴³⁰

Such dehumanizing and “naturalizing” metaphors were dominant closer to the end of July, when many of the media institutions reported refugees “running for their lives”⁴³¹ in the “tide of human misery,”⁴³² during “Rwanda’s greatest and final wave of refugees.”⁴³³ The metaphors used to associate the refugees with “movements of water,” which CBS did by describing the “tide” and “wave” of people, was not far from earlier descriptions of an inevitable and chaotic “bloodbath” or “civil war” because they all stereotypically suggest that it was a typical event that happens often.

⁴²⁸ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 40.

⁴²⁹ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 129.

⁴³⁰ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 129.

⁴³¹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 14, 1994.

⁴³² “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 14, 1994.

⁴³³ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 14, 1994.

In addition to the television broadcasters presenting metaphors and stereotypes that associated the Rwandans with animals or a “natural” and inevitable “instant catastrophe,” ABC, CBS and NBC continued to describe the genocide as “tribal warfare” or “civil war.” By suggesting that the death toll was “higher than anyone believed”⁴³⁴ at half a million people because of the “tribal warfare”⁴³⁵; or by explaining that “Rwanda's civil war continues down its bloody path” and that “there is no end in sight,” the broadcasters implied that the massacres and the refugee crisis was caused by “something innate within the Rwandan people who are likely to burst into savage slaughter at any time.”⁴³⁶ However, as Franks suggests, all of the stories were not completely fueled by African stereotypes and “tired clichés” because “they are also wildly inaccurate.” To be fair, as I will highlight below, the television broadcasters did occasionally refer to the atrocities happening in Rwanda between May and July as “genocide,” but it was still done inconsistently and far too late.

‘Genocide Amnesia’ and understanding ‘context’

The stories about the genocide and the resulting refugee crisis made their way through “various gatekeepers and various organizational routines”⁴³⁷ and were “constructed and shaped by reporters and editors who determine what is worthy of coverage and what is not and how events will be presented.”⁴³⁸

Between May and July of 1994, ABC, CBS and NBC television news broadcasts

⁴³⁴ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” May 18, 1994.

⁴³⁵ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” May 18, 1994.

⁴³⁶ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 126.

⁴³⁷ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 124.

⁴³⁸ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 121.

often referred to Rwanda with stereotypical “ethnic” or “tribal” labels suggesting that the conflict was “based on little more than brutal tribalism.”⁴³⁹ The journalists, like Mark Phillips, who were on the ground in Rwanda, started presenting stories towards the end of July—the first on July 15 with CBS—suggesting that the genocide in Rwanda was more than just a tribal massacre. However, despite presenting some truth and context, the American broadcasters often experienced a kind of ‘genocide amnesia,’⁴⁴⁰ in which they identified genocide in one report and then reverted to the stereotypical myths of “tribal warfare” or a “civil war” in a subsequent report.

For example, on May 7 and 9, ‘genocide amnesia’ was clearly at play when ABC acknowledged that it was in fact a “premeditated political act not a spontaneous ethnic hatred”⁴⁴¹ and human rights investigators “see a pattern,”⁴⁴² and CBS explained that the “bloodbath” in Rwanda would leave behind a “legacy of genocide.”⁴⁴³ However, on May 13, CBS returned to the myth of “nightmarish bloodbath in Rwanda,” and ABC followed suit on May 14, when they suggested that “at least half 1 million people have been killed during Rwanda's 5 weeks of civil war.” ABC’s ‘genocide amnesia’ seemed to only last until May 16 when they interviewed Jean Kambanda, the interim Rwandan Prime Minister, who said: “I don't think you'll find any proof of complicity by our government in the massacres.” However, the journalist, Ron Allen, seemed to refute that response

⁴³⁹ Wall, “The Rwanda crisis: an analysis of newsmagazine coverage,” 125.

⁴⁴⁰ A term I coined to describe a media source that suggested genocide was occurring in Rwanda, and then returned to using the myths by describing it as a stereotypical.

⁴⁴¹ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” May 7, 1994.

⁴⁴² “ABC WORLD NEWS,” May 7, 1994.

⁴⁴³ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” May 9, 1994.

by suggesting that the government was not telling the truth because they were largely responsible for the genocide: “Hardly anyone who has investigated the massacres believes the Rwandan government’s version of what happened.”⁴⁴⁴ ‘Genocide amnesia’ affected all of the American television broadcasters until the end of the month when ABC suggested that, after 2 weeks of not using the word, “from Rwanda today, the latest evidence of the genocide,”⁴⁴⁵ which was narrated over an image of a pile of dead bodies under a bridge.

NBC also experienced the side effects of “genocide amnesia” between a story that they presented on May 1—describing the situation in Rwanda as a “genocide”—and June 26, when they interviewed American National Security Adviser, Tony Lake, who suggested, “Rwanda should galvanize American concern for Africa” because it is “a story of ethnic hatred transformed into genocide.”⁴⁴⁶ The most telling part of NBC’s June 26 story was when Tom Petit juxtaposed the interview with the conference that was going to focus on “How America can lift pessimism into constructive plans for Rwandans and all of Africa.” For a media institution that promoted the transformation of “pessimism into constructive plans for Rwandans and all of Africa,” NBC disregarded their own advice because they only presented six very brief ten second stories throughout the month of June 1994. Only one of those—the one using Tony Lake’s quote—acknowledged the genocide and “constructive plans” for Rwanda.

After June 26, July 4 was the next time any of the American television broadcasters reiterated that the events in Rwanda were in fact genocide. For

⁴⁴⁴ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” May 16, 1994.

⁴⁴⁵ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” May 31, 1994.

⁴⁴⁶ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” June 26, 1994.

example on July 4, while NBC and CBS highlighted three months of “civil war,”⁴⁴⁷ ABC moved away from its “genocide amnesia” thanks to Ron Allen who suggested, “these Tutsi children have survived Rwanda's genocide, but their scars are indelible, crippling and deep” and “everywhere there are stories of horrific ordeals.”⁴⁴⁸ Finally acknowledging that the Hutu government was indeed committing a well planned and premeditated genocide was certainly a big step for both CBS⁴⁴⁹ and the American government, but it happened only three days before the genocide was over. Instead of publicly acknowledging the genocide and the government's role in the crisis months prior, both the American government and the American television broadcasters turned a blind eye to the murder of close to one million people. In fact, if any particular television network should be embarrassed by the mythology that it reported, NBC certainly should—especially considering that throughout the entire month of July 1994, the word genocide was never used on their network.

The broadcasts by ABC on July 16 and CBS on July 18 were the two most important broadcasts of the entire genocide. In these broadcasts, the networks had the story right, included the context, and the history of the conflict. However, it is extremely unfortunate to realize that these reports did not come until the final days and hours of the genocide. Like the previous stories, the July 18 piece on CBS began by exposing many of the typical myths associated with Rwanda and the “months of the war and tribal massacres.”⁴⁵⁰ However, like the story

⁴⁴⁷ “NBC NIGHTLY NEWS,” July 4, 1994.

⁴⁴⁸ “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 4, 1994.

⁴⁴⁹ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 15, 1994.

⁴⁵⁰ “CBS EVENING NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

presented on July 16, the importance of the July 18 broadcast once again relied on the words of CBS' correspondent, Mark Phillips, and the way in which he finally outlined the truth behind the genocide. Unfortunately, CBS did not broadcast Phillips' brilliant epiphany until the very last day of the massacre, but it was still an important acknowledgment for CBS to realize that they somehow "did contribute to [the genocide]." I consider the July 18 broadcast on CBS a bold statement by the network, but it was, tragically, far too late.

In a way, that point was also highlighted on ABC, on July 18, shortly after Peter Jennings said: "We begin tonight with Rwanda. Can it get any worse? Yes it can." As one can see from the coverage, the beginning of the July 18 broadcast was rather stereotypical with the suggestion that everything happening in Rwanda was inevitably getting worse and they followed the story with John McWethy highlighting another one of the reasons why, similar to the CBS broadcast, the American government was not interested in intervention: "When the idea of sending US medical teams or water specialists to Rwanda is raised, the Clinton administration says no. The White House wants no repeat of the disaster in Somalia, so the US will fly supplies to the region, but get no more deeply involved."⁴⁵¹ As I outlined in Chapter II, fears about repeating the "disaster in Somalia" were often used as a comparative metaphor from the beginning of the television coverage of the genocide on April 6. However, on the very last day of the genocide, July 18, ABC concluded their story on Rwanda with an interview with Roger Winter—who was also often interviewed by the other networks—and he stressed that the genocide in Rwanda was definitely not "yet another African

⁴⁵¹ "ABC WORLD NEWS," July 18, 1994.

bloodletting”: “This situation cannot be allowed to be viewed as yet another African bloodletting, but it was genocide in perhaps the purest construct of genocide that we've had since the Holocaust.”⁴⁵²

Conclusion

As one can see in the footage, the influence of “genocide amnesia” on the American television networks affected the way in which ABC, CBS and NBC described the genocide. However, not all of the blame can be put on the journalists, because it was the journalists on the ground in Rwanda—Philips and Allen—who understood the context of what was happening, told the truth and deconstructed previously reported myths. But by the time they had learned about the history and provided proper context at the end of July, close to one million people had already been killed. With those few exceptions, American television broadcasters were not focused on the genocide, and the stories from May until July constructed a different kind of stereotype that focused on the refugees and the humanitarian crisis “visible in US media only as crowded masses of ‘dirty,’ ‘unhealthy,’ ‘fatigued,’ ‘diseased’ bodies and therefore are understood as the vulgar anti-thesis of Western norms.”⁴⁵³ Myths about the Rwandans – both genocide victims and perpetrators and the fleeing refugees – continued to circulate in the network coverage and reinforced a racist portrayal of Africa.

⁴⁵² “ABC WORLD NEWS,” July 18, 1994.

⁴⁵³ Fair and Parks, “Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees,” 49.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the genocide in 2007, Allan Thompson suggested that “the stark reality is that all these years later, we have barely begun to learn the lessons about Rwanda.”⁴⁵⁴ One of the lessons we need to acknowledge is the continuity between the racist discourse in colonial Rwanda and the Western news coverage of the postcolonial massacres. We need to explore how the media – particularly the American news networks – “contributed directly to the genocide.”⁴⁵⁵ I have laboured under the premise that the mistakes of the past, those bungled stories about the Rwandan genocide in 1994, will influence the way future genocides are covered in the international news. Learning from the mistakes of the past can be useful because, as Allan Thompson points out, hindsight makes it “easy to see what the news media did wrong.”⁴⁵⁶ This point is reiterated by Linda Melvern, who suggests, “if the media forget the story then it is the media that has failed.”⁴⁵⁷ Likewise, Allan Thompson claims, “journalists could have had an impact in Rwanda—a sort of Heisenberg effect—had there been a significant enough media presence to influence events.”⁴⁵⁸ Unfortunately, instead of intervening, the American television media simply abandoned Rwanda after misinterpreting the genocide as ‘tribal warfare’ while hundreds of thousands of people were murdered. By the time the RPF took control of Kigali, and many of the international journalists were finally able to make their way safely into

⁴⁵⁴ Thompson, “Introduction,” 11.

⁴⁵⁵ Thompson, “Introduction,” 8.

⁴⁵⁶ Melvern, “Missing the Story: The Media and the Rwanda Genocide,” 106.

⁴⁵⁷ Melvern, “Missing the Story: The Media and the Rwanda Genocide,” 105.

⁴⁵⁸ Thompson, “Introduction,” 3.

Rwanda, it was the end of July and the genocide was over.⁴⁵⁹ Only then were the journalists able to see the aftermath of the systematic massacres with their own eyes, acknowledge the truth of the genocide and reconsider the accepted discourse of a supposedly random spontaneous 'tribal slaughter'.

My analysis dovetails with Fair's assertion that it was entirely possible for "engaged reporters and active spectators" to "force televised video footage and aerial images to bear witness to events that our political leaders refuse to 'see'."⁴⁶⁰ However, while it is important to encourage political leaders to "bear witness," it cannot happen unless individual viewers question the media messages they consume. Fair writes:

Theories about gender, post-colonialism, race/ethnicity, and post-modernism in and of themselves do not provide the answers, but simply provide the tools to be critical; it is up to the viewer of images to deploy these tools to question and reconsider what is beamed into their televisions or printed in their morning paper.⁴⁶¹

For the sake of the victims of future humanitarian crises and future genocides, the international community must examine the mistakes we made in 1994. Even though the mediascape has changed since 1994 with the introduction of social networks and 'citizen journalism', Journalists still must be increasingly vigilant, corporate news must examine their story priorities, and the public must take

⁴⁵⁹ Doyle, "Reporting the Genocide," 158.

⁴⁶⁰ Fair and Parks, "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees," 51.

⁴⁶¹ Karnik, "Rwanda & the Media: Imagery, War & Refuge," 621.

responsibility for the ways their viewership influences network coverage of stories about celebrities and stories about mass genocide. My goal in this thesis was not simply to reveal the flaws in the American television news networks, but also to suggest a potentially optimistic future where journalists could influence political and humanitarian intervention. The opportunity to make crimes against humanity 'visible' exists today in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur, and the Nuba Mountains in Southern Sudan, among others. If the international media and the American television broadcasters learn from the mistakes of the past, perhaps journalists will one day contribute to stopping a genocide instead of simply ignoring it.

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